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# The Vermont schoolmarm and the contemporary one-room schoolhouse : an ethnographic study of a contemporary one-room schoolteacher

Mary Josephine Willis Kenny

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# **OCCASIONAL PAPER #12**

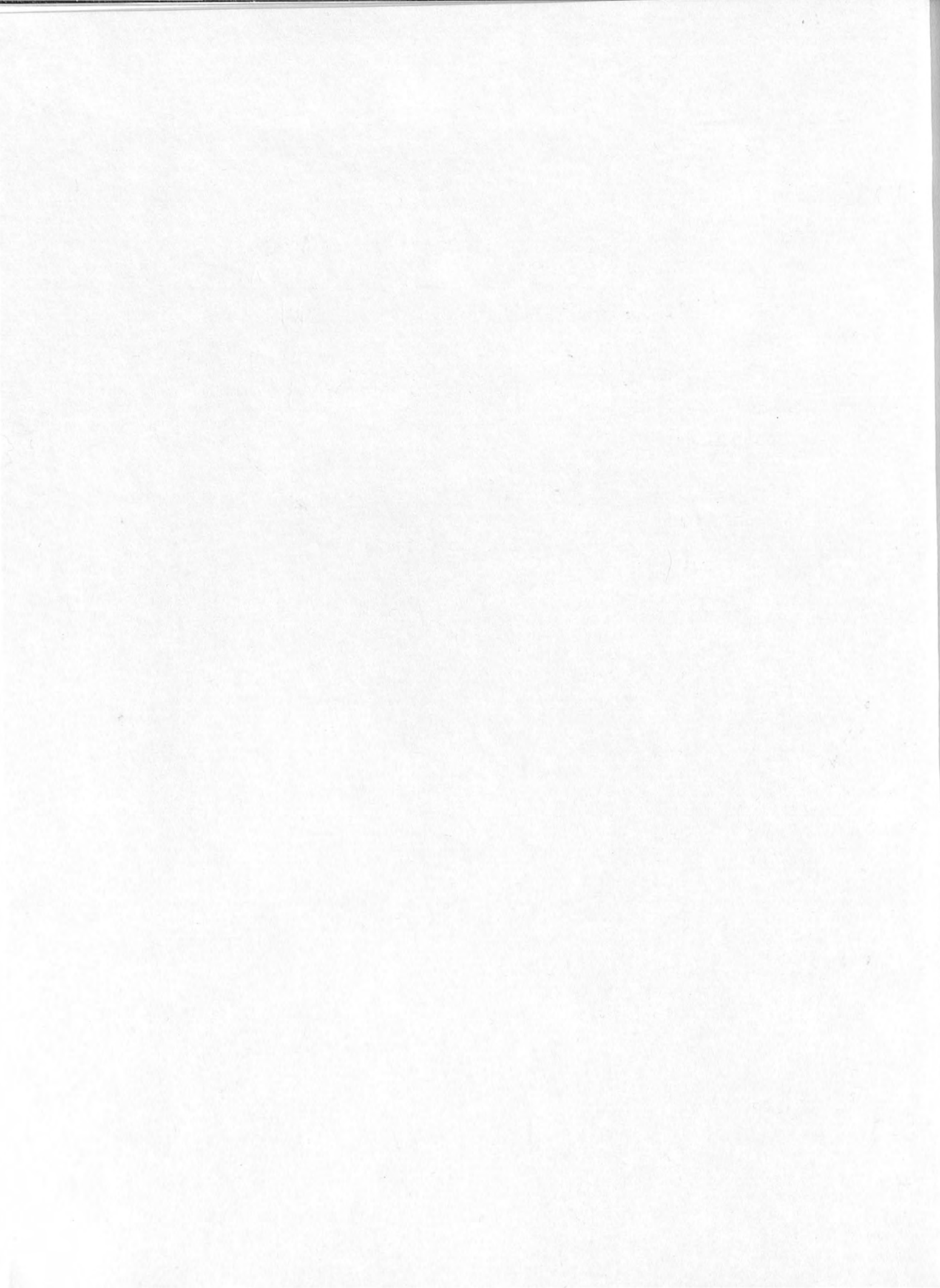
**THE VERMONT SCHOOLMARM  
AND THE  
CONTEMPORARY ONE-ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE**

**by**

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**EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
SAINT MICHAEL'S COLLEGE**

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BURLINGTON, VERMONT 05405  
802/656-4389**



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The Center for Research on Vermont  
University of Vermont  
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802/656-4389



## FOREWORD

*Stories, museum exhibits, pictures, paintings, and magazine articles have all made the little red schoolhouse nostalgically familiar and charming.*

-Ruth Zinar

The Center for Research on Vermont is delighted to bring you Occasional Paper #12. The Occasional Papers series is part of the Center's ongoing efforts to share with a wider audience research on Vermont topics, which might not otherwise receive the exposure it deserves. Paper #12 appears after a hiatus of several years as the Center has focused on projects such as Lake Champlain: Reflections on Our Past and the "We Vermonsters: Perspectives on the Past" series. We think you will find it has been worth the wait. As always, we welcome your comments whether in the form of substantive reactions to the paper, or in the form of ideas for future papers.

Paper #12 was excerpted and adapted from the 1989 dissertation, "The Vermont Schoolmarm and the Contemporary One-Room Schoolhouse: A Descriptive Study," by Mary Josephine Willis Kenny, which may be found in its entirety in the Special Collections of the University of Vermont Library, in the Vermont Historical Society Library, and in Durick Library at Saint Michael's College. We expect you will find Professor Kenny's work both interesting and timely. Consider, for example, the following observation from a recent issue of the Phi Delta Kappan dealing with educational reform:

[H]as the system, through its rigid school-entry schedule, its assumptions about age and grade levels, and its lock-step structure, created the problem? Do we really need to have all students start school and each grade at the same time? If not, why do we do it? One reason is bureaucratic convenience. And the other is that it makes it easier for the teacher to start talking and to cover the curriculum. It has little to do with children learning.<sup>1</sup>

Doesn't it sound as though well-known educator Albert Shanker is longing for the traditional one-room school?

In this work, Saint Michael's professor Jody Kenny has combined research into the development of Vermont's educational system with specific examination of the joys and difficulties of teaching in one of the few remaining one-room schools in the state. She takes us inside a traditional one-room schoolhouse and introduces us to the maybe-not-quite-so-traditional "schoolmarm" who teaches there. She asks us to consider what—apart from the nostalgia alluded to in the above quotation from Ruth Zinar—this Vermont schoolmarm might still have to offer us.<sup>2</sup> The question is of particular interest now as we enter a new decade, for Vermont has already received national attention as our Board of Education considers adoption of far-reaching educational goals for our third century:

- o Vermonters will see to it that every child becomes a competent, caring, productive, responsible individual and a citizen who is committed to continued learning throughout life.
- o Vermont will attract, support, and develop the most effective teachers and school leaders in the nation.
- o Vermonters will restructure their school system to support very high performance for all students.
- o Vermont parents, educators, students, and other citizens will create powerful partnerships to support teaching and learning in every community.<sup>3</sup>

The Vermont one-room schools and their schoolmarms may well suffer extinction before too long, whether or not Vermont adopts or implements these ambitious goals, but some of the observations of this study will surely be pertinent to the shaping of whatever educational future does emerge for the state.

Jennie G. Versteeg  
Chair, Board of Editors  
Occasional Papers Series

## NOTES

1. Albert Shanker, "The End of the Traditional Model of Schooling - and a Proposal for Using Incentives to Restructure Our Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, 71 (January 1990), 350.
2. Ruth Zinar, "Educational Problems in Rural Vermont, 1875-1900: A Not So Distant Mirror," Vermont History, 51 (Fall 1983), 203-4.
3. Chris Pipho, "Objects in This Mirror May Be Closer Than They Appear," Phi Delta Kappan, 71 (December 1989), 262.

### About the Occasional Papers Series

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## I.

### INTRODUCTION

*For the historian to ignore interpretations of the recent past is to leave the ground . . . "to fiction and romance." By asking when and why issues have become defined as problems at certain times and in certain places, historians can call attention to underlying structural issues, which in turn helps to determine a more effective policy than accepting current terms of debate as controlling.*

-David Tyack

The steady decline in the number of one-room schoolteachers in this century has been dramatic. The one-room schoolteacher in Vermont is approaching extinction, and during the 1987-88 school year, only five teachers continue to teach in one-room schools. In contrast, in 1900 there were 1,571 one-room schools in Vermont (Stone, c. 1927); in 1914, 1,307 existed (Stone), and during the 1947-48 school year 18.4% of Vermont children still attended such schools (Gaumnitz and Blose, 1950, p. 23). As can be seen in Table 1 on the next page, at that time 57.3% of all Vermont schools were still of the one-room variety, and almost one-quarter of Vermont's teachers taught in such schools.

However, since 1944, the number of these schools in Vermont has decreased from 752 to the present five schools. Figures in Table 1 from the Vermont Department of Education show 875 one-room rural schoolteachers in 1939-40, twenty-two in 1965, twelve in 1970-71, eight in 1975-76, and seven in 1980-81.

School enrollment patterns in the United States mirror Vermont's decline in the number of small schools. From the beginning of the eighteenth century to the middle of the 1900s, most teachers in the United States taught in one-room, rural schools. In 1913, one-half of all children in the country were instructed in one of the 212,000 existing one-room buildings;



yet by 1984, it was estimated that only 835 such schools were still in operation (Gulliford, 1984).

Table 1

One-room Schools in Vermont: 1917-18 to 1947-48

<u>Years</u>	<u>No. of Schools</u>	<u>Percent Remaining</u>	<u>Percent of All Schools</u>	<u>Percent of Teachers</u>
1917-18	1,250	100.0%	95.3%	43.3%
1927-28	1,087	86.9	78.8	41.9
1937-38	893	71.4	57.0	34.7
1939-40	875	70.0	68.0	33.0
1941-42	772	61.8	68.4	29.2
1943-44	752	60.2	66.8	30.0
1945-46	650	52.0	62.9	28.0
1947-48	571	45.7	57.3	24.3

Source: Gaumnitz & Blose, 1950, pp. 19-22.

Note: Statistics are for "one-teacher" schools, so they may be slightly higher than figures for "one-room" schools. The one-teacher figure for 1937 exactly matches the Vermont Education Department one-room school figure for the same year. No further comparisons were available.

"Percentage of total schools" includes high schools in the total. If only elementary schools were considered, these percentages would be higher. A 1948 National Commission on School District Reorganization study showed the following for 1943-44: 1,125, total schools; 1,035, elementary schools; 90, secondary schools; 752 one-teacher schools.

This study was conducted to identify, describe, and analyze the significant issues facing one of the five remaining Vermont schoolmarms. This examination provides a perspective concerning what is being lost as Vermont one-room schools face extinction. The description and analysis of issues facing the one-room schoolteacher may be of importance for three major reasons: (1) as documentation of the educational heritage of the one-room school tradition in Vermont, (2) as an examination of current issues facing teachers in small, rural schools, and (3) as a trajectory for future educational policies and trends. We need to learn from the one-room schoolteacher while she still exists.

Anne Martin, a one-room schoolteacher in Lodi, Vermont, was selected as the primary subject of the study conducted in the field during the 1987-88 school year. The names "Anne Martin" and "Lodi" are pseudonyms, as are all references used for living individuals and neighboring towns in the study, in order to protect their anonymity. The study was concerned not only with the contemporary one-room setting, but also with small, rural school, historical tradition, as Anne Martin perceived and acted upon specific issues.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOL IN VERMONT

The pioneer schoolhouses of the 1700s were primitive structures constructed of logs at the edges of clearings or beside trails. They had split-log seats and desks, but few supplies. Around 1800, plank-sided structures started to be built. Because of the problems of travel, towns often needed more than one school. The growth in the number of schools during the 1800s and decline during the 1900s is dramatic, as shown in Table 2 below.

As can be seen from the table, the school enrollment figures for 1860 and 1966 are similar, but the actual make-up of classrooms was not. The popular, picturesque vision of the early one-room school as a bright and airy center of learning ignores the reality that most were cold, dirty, and poorly ventilated. Many had problems with drinking water and out-houses. In 1846, Gov. Horace Eaton, who simultaneously served as Vermont's first state superintendent of education, wrote in his first annual report, "Our school houses are almost uniformly located in an uninteresting and unsuitable spot, and that the buildings themselves too generally exhibit an unfavorable, and even repulsive aspect. . . . The interior does but correspond with the exterior, or is if possible still worse" (p. 8). He noted that one side of one schoolhouse formed part of a hog-yard fence.

Table 2

Vermont Public School Data: 1820-1976

<u>Years</u>	<u>No. of Schools</u>	<u>No. of Pupils<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>No. of Teachers</u>
1820	1,600	N.A.	N.A.
1860	2,754	89,697	4,885
1880	2,597	79,366	4,336
1900	2,410	90,648	3,752
1920	2,349	70,870	3,020
1966-67	466	87,574	4,364
1969-70	416	99,994	5,581
1972-73	417	106,517	6,050
1975-76	410	104,875	6,137

Source: Huden, 1944, p. 28; Stone, c.1927, pp. 102-103; Vermont Department of Education, 1973, 1977, 1979.

<sup>a</sup>These figures may vary because of the ages of children enrolled: 1860, 4-18; 1880, 5-20; 1900, 5-21; 1920, 6-18. Enrollment differs greatly from attendance. In 1860, the average daily attendance was less than half of the enrollment.

A study of schools the next year showed some improvements. Of the 1,190 schools reporting in 1847, 1,041 indicated they had blackboards, but "scarcely any apparatus for instruction beyond the blackboard could be heard of in the state" (Eaton, 1847, p. 10). Only twenty-eight had some "apparatus" such as a globe or blocks; just ninety had any maps or charts. A teacher of an average age of 22.4 years with 4.7 seasons of experience taught an average of twenty classes a day. Male teachers were paid approximately \$12.72 a month and were outnumbered by female teachers who received \$5.32 a month. Eaton considered the "paramount evil" of Vermont schools to have been "the want of thoroughly trained teachers" (1846, p. 16).

The Carnegie Commission Study of 1912-14 in Vermont showed 2,400 public elementary schools; however, this figure is misleading for at that time "school" did not mean "school-house," but rather "schoolroom" (p. 25). There were 1,662

schoolhouses that year, 1,366 of which were one-room (p. 56). Half of the teachers were between 20-30 years of age and had 2-7 years of experience. There were 256 male and 2,735 female teachers of whom slightly more than one-third had graduated from a normal school or college. The study concluded:

The typical rural school teacher is therefore a young woman of about twenty-three, who has been teaching about four years for \$8.50 a week or \$275 a school year. In many cases she teaches in her home town and either walks or drives from one to five miles to get to her school. She is a graduate of a four year high school, but has had no professional training. . . . She either succeeds or fails in accordance with her native ability, and this fortunately is large. (p. 42)

The Carnegie study noted that the 1910 Census showed Vermont tied with Kansas for first place in proportion of school-age children who were enrolled in school for that year. Children were educated in buildings found to be generally painted and in good repair, although the interiors were described as not as well kept. By 1912, homemade benches and desks had disappeared in favor of adjustable desks. Not more than 5% had school yards big enough for a ball diamond. There were few trees or shrubs, and children often played in the road.

#### THE TOWN OF LODI

A dozen mountains between 2,500 feet and 3,500 feet tower over the narrow valley where most of the 288 citizens in Lodi reside. The heavily forested mountains provide an impressive backdrop of small brooks, rocky ledges, and abundant wildlife for the village and its one-room schoolhouse. The rough, higher elevations consist of untillable, rocky soil, but the valley contains small patches of farmland.

There is no town center in Lodi although two small clusters of houses line the road that bisects the town. The road passes the town clerk's office, a cemetery, a combination grocery-and-gas-station, a garage for car repairs, a wood mill, a meeting-



house, the school, and a couple of gift shops hoping to attract passing tourists, as they travel to ski areas in neighboring towns. A small sign indicates the location of the post office, a room in the postmistress's home. The road continues down the valley through two other small towns, which together with Lodi, are referred to as the Coolidge Valley. The town closest to Lodi in distance and in character is known as Woodsville. The local high school, a bank, and a few stores are located in the third town, Glencliff, a community slightly larger than Lodi or Woodsville. The valley has had close social and economic ties since settlement began in the 1780s because of their "shared geographic isolation, common terrain, and similar natural resources" (Center for Rural Studies, 1986, p. 85).

The town, granted by Gov. Thomas Chittenden in 1780, was chartered to a group of proprietors the following year. Settlement began almost immediately, perhaps because the proprietors offered one hundred acres of land to the first women who would settle permanently in the town with their families. By the 1791 Census, Lodi had a population of 101 citizens. During these early years the economy of the valley was based on natural resources, especially timber and wildlife.

Settlement of the 33,600 acres was continuous until the town population hit its zenith in 1880. In her 1868 Gazetteer, Abby Hemenway noted Lodi had one meetinghouse, one store, one tavern, one railroad station, one small factory, two post offices, two blacksmiths, two carriage makers, three shoemakers, eight carpenters, three clapboard mills, and eight sawmills (p. 42).

After reaching a population high point of 830 citizens in 1880, population declined steadily until the 1950 Census, when 213 citizens were recorded. Indeed, the 225 pupils who attended school in Lodi in 1880, comprised a higher number than the entire population of the town in the mid-1900s. Lodi's growth and decline reflect a pattern common in other rural

areas of the state for this time period. Since 1950, Lodi has shared Vermont's growth with a steady, but slight increase in population.

Lodi is not a wealthy town. Most of those employed within the town are involved with wood products or logging. The school expenditure per pupil for 1983 was \$2,005 compared to \$2,408 for the state. The effective school tax rate was only slightly above the state average; however, the resident tax burden was twelfth highest out of 246 Vermont towns (Vermont State Department of Taxes, 1986). At its 1986 town meeting, Lodi appropriated \$193,841 for the 1986-87 school year, a figure which included tuition expenses for the fifth- through twelfth-grade students in addition to the Lodi School budget. In the 1986 Annual Town Report, the school superintendent wrote, "The difficult issue facing your school system . . . is the cost of education and the scope of services available for that cost. We are at a point of maximum service for the ability of the local taxpayers' contribution" (Town of [Lodi], Vermont, 1986, p. 19).

Lodi exhibits diversity in ages, educational levels, income, and ties to the area. Individual incomes are polarized with one group clustered at each end of the income spectrum. A significant number of residents live in the area because of its beauty, its friendliness, and the area's recreational opportunities (Center for Rural Studies, 1986). The town's most pressing problems are housing, tax base expansion, and the availability of desirable employment opportunities.

#### LODI SCHOOL IN 1987-88

Lodi School was built in 1857, making it, according to a CBS television program, "the country's longest running one-room schoolhouse." The white clapboard building sits in the shadow of the town meetinghouse, which is used for gym classes in the winter, instrumental music lessons, and as a meeting place for

the school district psychologist when he visits several of the children on Fridays. These activities require special space, which justifies having someone come to start a fire in the boiler for heat; otherwise, for much of the school year the meetinghouse is too cold for regular use and too expensive to heat continuously.

On school days, from 7:45 until 8:15 A.M. and at 3:30 P.M., a variety of vehicles pull into the gravel parking area in front of the school. Only a couple of students walk to school. Most arrive in car-pools, for the school's contract with a private agency only provides "minibus" service after school. Several parents elect to pick up their children, for the "minibus" only stops along the main road, meaning that many children would have to hike "up the hill" for considerable distances. In good weather a few mothers occasionally come to school on horseback to pick up their children. On a typical day, the parking area line-up includes an old truck with feed sacks and fence posts in the back, a four-wheel-drive vehicle, an old station wagon, and an expensive foreign car. The dropping off and picking up ritual also serves a social purpose, as many parents choose to come into the school for a brief visit with the teacher or with each other.

In the winter, children play "King of the Mountain" on parking area snow banks which tower over their heads. During other seasons they play on the teeter-totters, slide, swings, and jungle gym, or engage in games such as tag, kickball, or four square. The teacher readily participates in the children's games and has distinguished herself as a formidable competitor in games requiring a fast runner and as the school expert on the techniques of a good handspring or cartwheel. The students call their teacher by her first name, "Anne."

Most of the 1857 building is one large classroom with blackboards lining two walls. A row of large windows over a long counter bearing a ditto-master machine, an old typewriter,

a tape recorder, plants, and materials from various projects make up the third wall. A few high windows on the "back wall" overlook the teacher's desk, file cabinets, a door to a small furnace room, a library area, a table for an inexpensive computer, and a door to the bathrooms. One enters the front of the building into a small, coatroom area with one door leading into the classroom and another into a long, narrow kitchen where hot lunch is prepared daily. The children eat and work at desks, many of which are, according to one parent, "the same ones I sat in." Before the start of the 1987-88 school year, the wood floors were refinished, and the walls were painted white with rose-colored wood trim.

Anne Martin is in her late twenties, trim, and of moderate height. Her short, stylishly cut, black hair frames flashing dark eyes and a wide smile. Although this was her first year teaching at Lodi, Anne has the advantage of being a "local girl." She graduated from Glencliff High School, a classmate of several of the Lodi School parents. After attending college in Boston, she returned to Glencliff to marry a young farmer and to teach. After teaching in neighboring schools in the valley, Anne was hired at Lodi where she serves as acting principal in most situations, taking responsibility for school correspondence, record keeping, ordering of supplies, and emergency situations.

School opened the Thursday before Labor Day in 1987 with nineteen children evenly divided among grades one to four. When the town first approved a program for kindergartners, they were sent to Glencliff, then in subsequent years to Woodsville. A lack of appropriate materials, no time in the schedule for additional activities, and state mandates limiting classroom enrollment to a maximum of twenty-five pupils prevented the addition of the kindergarten pupils to Lodi School. In recent years state requirements forced the school board to tuition fifth- and/or sixth-grade students to Glencliff, depending on



enrollment for any specific year. Because a decision concerning Lodi enrollment figures is made on a year-to-year basis, the teacher's yearly contract is signed for grades one through six. This keeps the town's options open, while it also preserves the school's status as a one-room school. If the town ever decides to tuition the sixth- or fifth-grade students permanently, it would obtain a designation from the Vermont State Department of Education as a one-teacher school, not a one-room school.

The Lodi students come from varied backgrounds. Some have traveled widely; others have never seen an elevator. Differences exist in economic well-being, intelligence, social skills, and personal traits.

In addition to the teacher and a teacher's aide, Evelyn Ross, there is a steady stream of personnel coming into and out of the classroom. The school board contracts with the school district to provide visits from a physical education teacher and a vocal and instrumental music teacher on a weekly basis and a school psychologist and nurse as necessary. Evelyn is hired to teach art classes. The elementary supervisor, who doubles as principal of Glencliff Elementary School, visits at least once weekly and is in frequent touch with the teacher by telephone. Funding for visits three to five times a week from the speech therapist and from the Chapter 1/special education teacher is handled through the school district. The school cook serves as the school janitor for part of the year. A food agent keeps records for the school lunch program.

The school board is composed of three members, each of whom cares about the school and the teacher in different ways. Elizabeth, an unmarried, outspoken, cigar-smoking woman in her seventies, who owns many houses and plows snow from the roads in her part of town, has served on the board for "thirty-six to forty" years. She has general concerns over increasing state control in education, decreasing parental support of

schools, declining emphasis on "basic" subjects, lack of student discipline, and school expenses. Susan, the chairperson and the only one of the three with a child in the school, had moved to a commune in Lodi during the 1970s, when many young adults came to rural areas of Vermont looking for a simpler life style. Now, "middle class" in actions and appearance, she can be counted on to drive on a field trip, study a school budget, or perform any necessary school task. Her relaxed style is in contrast to the outspoken, forceful style of Ed, a young bachelor who comes from a family of teachers. Ed's brother is on the Woodsville school board and his father is on the board at Glencliff. The three members of Ed's family consider it a duty to monitor school expenditures.

Lodi is located in Steuben Southwest Supervisory Union, a school district of seven schools and six school boards covering such a large geographic area that the district superintendent drives more than 25,000 miles a year on school business (Steuben Southwest District School Directors' Minutes, 1961, p. 51; interview, Superintendent Will Dickinson). To get to Lodi School, the superintendent drives over a mountain for twenty miles, a thirty- to forty-five-minute trip each way. Lodi's share of the district budget is small: \$2,499 is projected for the 1988-89 school year. At present Lodi pays the district \$12,708 a year for special education services for eight of its nineteen children.

The school has a Parents' Club which meets monthly with two to eight in attendance, plus the teacher. The club traditionally runs three fund raisers a year, raising about \$400 yearly for things such as a videocassette recorder or a dishwasher.

#### LODI SCHOOL HISTORY

The first reference to schooling in town records was a warning dated February 23, 1801, to meet on March 2, 1801, in a "dwelling house" to "divide the town into School Districts"

and to "(raise) money to support schools." [Lodi] Town Proceedings (p. 29) confirmed that the town passed these items. No further entries occurred in the records until 1832, but existing schools must have abided by a Vermont "Act to Provide for the Support of Common Schools" which was passed in 1827, requiring that the following subjects be taught: English reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, history, geography, and good behavior (Huden, 1943, p. 231). The schools prospered, matching the growing population of the town, for by 1832, 30 "schollars" [sic] are listed in the River Destrict [sic] school, 42 in the North Hollow Destrict, 33 in the South Hollow Destrict, and 14 in the North Hill Destrict, a total of 119 students. Two years later, in 1834, Lodi school enrollment had risen to 137 students, and by 1836, a fifth school opened in town. Enrollment was recorded by naming the heads of households:

List of schollars in the South Hollow School District in March 1834: Jeremiah Parker, 1; Joseph Flint, 1; Otis Thayer, 1; Amos Lamb, 1; Stephen Waid, 4; \_\_\_\_\_ Atwell, 2; Abel Thayer, 4; John Vinton, 7; Hiram Ford, 2; Warren Lamb, 5; Joseph Lamb, 2; Lucian Bingham, 2; John Thatcher, 1; Martha Ball, 1. ([Lodi] Town Proceedings, p. 102)

In 1844, schools started to be referred to by number, such as "School District #2," and town records became more detailed, including children's names and other data. School District #1 listed 56 "names of children," yet recorded 50 "scholars who have attended school." School District #2 listed 44 "names of children" and 50 "scholars who have attended school." A possible explanation might be found in figures for School District #3, which listed 32 children plus two "scholars over eighteen" making a "whole no." of 34. Discrepancies may be due to truancy, students attending school after age eighteen, or pupils attending school in a different district from the one in which they resided.

Additional data for Lodi reflect findings in other sources on the history of Vermont education (Bush, 1900; Stone, c.1927;

Huden, 1943). School usually was conducted for two terms, one summer and one winter, in order to avoid mud season in spring and fall harvest. Males were paid much higher wages than female teachers and taught for the winter term when the older scholars attended school. Women taught the younger children during the summer term. The Town Proceedings of 1843 (pp. 168-170) show:

Statistics of School District No. 1:

Whole Number of Children--56  
No. of Scholars who have attended school--50  
12 weeks taught by male teacher at \$16 per month--\$48  
21 weeks taught by female teacher at \$4 per mo.--\$21  
Rec. and appropriated of Public money--\$59.13

Statistics of School District No. 2:

Whole Number of Children--44  
No. of Scholars who have attended school--50  
11 weeks taught by male at \$10 per mo.--\$28.50  
16 weeks taught by female at \$3 per mo.--\$12.00  
Rec. and appropriated of Public money--\$47.04

Statistics of School District No. 3:

(Children)--32  
Scholars over eighteen--2  
Whole Number--34  
School taught by female 15 weeks at \$3 per mo.--\$11.25  
12 weeks by female at \$6.00 pr. mo.--\$18.00  
Received and appropriated of public money--\$24.00

Statistics of School District No. 4:

(Children)--32  
No. of Scholars who have attended school--33  
13 weeks taught by male at \$8 pr. mo.--\$24.00  
12 weeks taught by female at \$2.32 pr. mo.--\$6.96  
Rec. and appropriated of public money--\$35.28

Statistics of School District No. 5:

(Children)--13  
12 weeks taught by female at \$2.32 pr. mo.--\$6.96  
8 weeks taught by male at \$4 pr. mo.--\$8.00  
Rec. and appropriated of public money--\$13.72

Throughout the nineteenth century, the length of a school term, the pay of teachers, and school enrollments varied widely



from year to year and from school to school. For example, North Hill School had thirteen scholars in 1833, but twenty-three in 1834, due in large part to a family with seven children who moved into the district. The greatest differential in pay was in 1859 at School #4 which paid a female \$8.00 for eight weeks and a male \$40.50 for nine weeks. Pay appeared to have been negotiated according to experience, sex, teacher availability, and the demands of the particular teacher. By midcentury, schools were open between 21 and 28 weeks a year with enrollments ranging from 22 to 59 students.

Town population and the number of schools grew simultaneously with the addition of District #8 in 1846 and #7 in 1854. In 1859, town records show a proposal for a "union school" (Town Meeting Agenda). Lodi, Woodsville, and Glencliff joined to form a school in a shared geographic area that was not easily accessible to other areas of the individual towns, a practical solution to the reality that many Vermont town boundaries were determined without consideration of geographic features such as mountains.

An "Act Relative to Common Schools" for Vermont, passed on November 23, 1858, revised the funding and organization of schools in the state. For the law to be carried out, the state developed a method for obtaining school data. The school register system, starting in Lodi on April 1, 1859, provided enrollment figures, a wide range of questions such as "Has the school a globe?" excerpts from the latest school laws, and special topics such as recommended textbooks, state Normal School information, or visitor comments. Registers for the seven schools in Lodi for 1859-60 recorded the following:

1. Six of the seven still had a male teacher for one term and a female for the other. Of the twelve different teachers, two had attended an institute and two had previously taught in the district.
2. School was held five and a half days a week for twelve to twenty-six weeks a year.

3. None of the schools had a globe, any books of reference, a clock, a thermometer, or a belfry. Two had one or more maps. Blackboard size ranged from 4 square feet to 105 square feet, with the median 12 square feet.
4. On average the superintendent visited each school once a term.
5. School attendance varied. School #2, whose average daily attendance was between ten and twenty-five students, depending on the term, reported 769 cases of tardiness.
6. There were four reported cases of corporal punishment.

In 1870, twelve teachers from the nine existing schools listed their ages in the school registers: one teacher was age 14; two were age 15; one was 17; two were 18; two, age 20; one, age 24; one, age 25; one, age 27; and one, age 28. Records for that year reflect that most of the male teachers in the state had been replaced by women during the Civil War, and women continued to dominate the elementary teaching profession after the war. During an average school day, the teachers reported that they taught between seven and thirty-six different class lessons. About the teacher of School #6, Edna Smith, a visitor, commented, "[I]f the schollars havent learnt the teacher is not to blame."

By 1880, ten schools were in operation, but two of those closed by 1890, due to decreasing town population. In 1900, schools again began to be referred to by names such as West Hill School, and they started to become more standardized. Most held classes in three terms: from the beginning of May to July 1, after Labor Day until Thanksgiving, and from early December until mid-February. School populations seemed to vary widely. School enrollment for the Lower Village School indicated: 17 pupils, 1907-08; 11 pupils, 1908-09; 5 pupils, 1909-10; and 22 pupils in 1910-11, including six new five- or six-year-old children. In 1908, six schools were in operation, and by 1916, there were four.

As a result of findings of the Vermont Carnegie Foundation Study of 1912-14, many changes occurred in education in the following years. The number of required weeks of school increased from twenty-four to thirty-four weeks, with one teacher hired for the year. Teacher training was encouraged, state certification testing was required, and school administration was revised. Public Acts of 1915 required schools to teach "spelling, reading, writing, English grammar, geography, arithmetic, history of U.S., Constitution of U.S., good behavior, elementary physiology with special reference to effect of alcohol and narcotics, citizenship, and freehand drawing" (Huden, 1944, p. 231).

The Lodi district superintendent reported in 1921-22 that sixty-eight pupils were enrolled in four schools, and that "the children of this town are sadly in need of a modern two room building." His proposal was not accepted, and the building, which was sixty-four years old at that time, continues in use today, now more than 130 years old.

Comments in the school register for the Corner School for 1927-28, reflect the importance of the school to community social life. The school bought "three swings, two teeterboards and a merry-go-round installed with money earned by children" through a minstrel show, a Halloween program and a box social. Students celebrated Armistice Day, Christmas, Washington's Birthday, pre-Memorial exercises, Memorial Day, graduation, and a dedication as "one of the Standard Schools in Vermont."

In 1935, the Corner School hired Lula Davisson. After graduating from high school in 1922, Lula received one year of teacher training in a program sponsored by a local school district. She started teaching in 1924 for \$654 a year, switching schools occasionally during her thirty-seven years of teaching and taking a few years off when she got married and had a child. In 1947-48 and 1948-49, she taught at Lodi

village School. Lula Davisson still lives in Woodsville and was interviewed for this study.

By 1939, the three schools enrolled a total of forty-five children in grades one to eight, a number close to the enrollment of the River School in 1835. The Corner School closed in 1947 and the East School in 1961, leaving one school in Lodi. In 1963, the school hired Nellie Rempis, a teacher who taught for the next twenty-four years at the school, retiring at the beginning of the 1987-88 school year. Anne Martin became the new Lodi schoolmarm and presently serves as one of the last five Vermont one-room schoolteachers.

#### A TYPICAL DAY FOR ANNE MARTIN

On February 10, 1988, Anne arose at her usual waking hour of 4:30 A.M., a carry-over from the years when she helped her husband do chores on their dairy farm before she left to teach in Woodsville. Anne and her husband sold their farm, but she still gets up early to prepare for the day at Lodi. For two hours she wrote lesson plans for a third-grade math group and corrected reading work and spelling lessons; then she quickly dressed in an olive jumpsuit, pink sneakers, bright nail polish and then sped down the road in her white Toyota to Lodi.

By 7:30 A.M., Anne was at school preparing worksheets, sorting through the school mail, and gathering necessary supplies. Soon after eight o'clock, Evelyn and some of the children started to arrive. The half-hour before school is a social time at Lodi School, and many parents came into the classroom to say hello to Anne, various children, and each other. Anne moved around talking to everyone while she tried to finish preparations and touch base with Evelyn about special events planned for the day. Two children put up the school flag.

The school day officially started at 8:30 A.M., with a flag salute, a song, and some body stretches while sounds and smells



emerged from the kitchen where Mr. R. already had begun to prepare snack and lunch. The morning lessons consisted of three hours of reading, math, and spelling instruction with a fifteen-minute snack break as children worked at their desks, which were arranged in a U-shape. Most of the morning instruction was individualized, in groups, or conducted with peer tutors. Between her work with five reading groups and other subjects, Anne moved around the room, helping individual children. During my year of observations, I never saw Anne sit in the antique wooden chair which had been the designated teacher's place through several generations of teachers. Her physical energy permeated the room as she moved from one group to the next, always with an animated face, a voice filled with enthusiasm, and lots of pats and hugs. Children often switched desks during the day and frequently shared materials. A remedial specialist worked with individuals in one corner of the classroom throughout the morning.

At noon children set their desks up with placemats where they ate homemade hamburger/vegetable soup, crackers, carrot sticks, celery with peanut butter, and fresh cookies. Anne briefly sat with Evelyn, the specialist, two children, and me at the reading table where designated student "helpers" served the adults their food before children were allowed to get their trays, a tradition carried over from when Nellie taught at Lodi. After lunch, children brushed their teeth, then eagerly pulled on snowsuits and boots to climb the huge snowdrifts that encircled the parking lot. Anne joined the children outside in their games of fox-and-geese and tag, as she normally did.

The afternoon started at 1 P.M., with silent reading followed by children sharing projects they had done on the solar system and a Weekly Reader lesson. As usual, the afternoon centered on social studies and science units, which were presented to the class as a whole. The end of the school day included sharing time and classroom duties such as vacuum-

ing, taking the flag down, and watering plants. The children left at 3:30 P.M., after a seven-hour school day with six hours of instruction time, a longer day than most Vermont elementary schools.

After school, Anne worked until 4:45 P.M., cleaning up the room, organizing her desk, collecting materials which she would need to work on at home, and answering the telephone. After dinner, she attended a one-and-a-half-hour in-service class on computers. By 8:45 P.M., she was "zzzzz Dead to the World" after a typical workday of nearly thirteen hours.

Anne faces a variety of demands as she teaches all content areas to four grade-levels. She must devise, implement, and evaluate programs to meet the diverse needs of the children in her classroom. The methods she uses include peer-teaching, individualized instruction, group work, and lessons presented to the class as a whole.

Lodi has special teachers for art, music, physical education, and speech, so Anne does not need to teach these subjects although she chooses to include some of these areas in other classroom activities. Specialists provide instruction on a one-on-one basis for those qualifying for special educational help; however, Anne needs many skills in working with special-needs children since she has primary responsibility for their learning during most of the day. Nationally, 92.3% of all one-room schoolteachers teach physical education, 94% teach art, 77.9% teach music, and 35.3% have sole responsibility for special education needs (Muse, Smith, Barker, 1987, p.14). Although Anne has greater responsibilities than most other teachers, she has fewer related professional duties such as committees and staff meetings.

One-room schoolteachers have always spent a great deal of time carrying out nonteaching duties. Today, extraneous duties at Lodi are mostly secretarial or administrative tasks such as sorting school mail, handling phone calls, ordering supplies,

informing others of school cancellations, taking water samples, completing the school register, and filling out questionnaires and answering communications which come to the school from the state. Anne says that "we get a lot" of mail from the state, and she finds it difficult to find time to properly address all the forms, so they get "pushed to the back burner." She feels that these tasks take energy away from her teaching role.

National studies show that many noninstructional responsibilities are performed regularly by one-room schoolteachers. Varying percentages of teachers assume the following tasks: custodial, 68.2%; secretarial, 62.4%; building/grounds, 30.6%; lunch preparation, 16.2%; drive school bus, 7.0% (Muse, Smith, Barker, 1987, p. 16). Only a small percentage receive added compensation for these extra duties. At Lodi Anne does all secretarial tasks, a small amount of cleaning, and some building/grounds tasks such as planting flowers around the school and building storage bins or other items for the classroom.

Throughout the last century and a half, rural teachers had fewer administrative duties than today's one-room schoolmarm; however, most performed more physical chores related to the school building. Robina Randall of East Bakersfield noted that in 1925, her "last chore for the day was to split a dry board for kindling and to chop a slab of block wood into fine pieces to start the morning fire. . . . Fifty years ago a teacher had to know how to swing an axe as well as a pointer" (Association of Retired Teachers of Vermont, 1975, p. 23).

The necessary characteristics of successful contemporary rural teachers, as perceived by other rural teachers include a sense of humor, adaptability, tact, community involvement, rural orientation, and resourcefulness (Bandy and Gleadow, 1980, in Williams and Cross, 1985). Muse, Smith, and Barker (1987, p. 9) found that the typical one-room schoolteacher is

thirty-nine years old, a woman (89%), and married (65%). Anne personifies these characteristics, except that she is younger.

Anne says that to fulfill her role she needs a knowledge of child development and of how to handle special needs; a sense of curriculum in all areas; an ability to adjust; strength in order to deal with so many different people; flexibility; a willingness to give a little; and the ability to communicate well. She feels the hardest thing about her job is the need to maintain her energy. Because of the wide range of teaching and nonteaching duties required of Anne, many would concur with Mr. R.'s assessment that "there's not a harder working teacher in this valley."





## II.

### THE QUESTION OF SCALE: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SMALLNESS

*So much of the school is the teacher who's there.*

-Evelyn Ross, Lodi School Teacher's Aide

*Others look at this little school and see only a crack under the door of an old building. They don't see the real school. It's the center of our community.*

-Mr. Rempis, Lodi School Cook

Lodi Elementary School's most obvious, most pervasive asset is its small scale. The school's size also is its most troublesome drawback. When Anne Martin started teaching at Lodi in the fall of 1987, a limited school enrollment extending over four grade levels dictated classroom instruction, pupil-peer relationships, teacher-student interaction, and community involvement.

Small scale refers both to class numbers and the physical size of the school building. The one Lodi classroom encompasses the entire school structure with the exception of a narrow kitchen, a utility room, a mini-entry area which barely accommodates the children's coats and boots, and two toilet stalls, which are accessed through a little room containing a single table, a few chairs, the telephone, a sink, and a supply cabinet. This poorly heated cubicle offers the only private place in the school for tutoring or small-group work; however, activity there frequently is interrupted by the telephone or students walking through to the bathroom.

Most Lodi students view the one-room setting positively:

"I'm not scared of big kids here. I was [scared] the first day of school, but I got to know them."

"This is a 'be kind' school. We share things. Everybody loves each other."



"It's easier to cooperate when there are different ages, because the younger kids listen to the older ones. And the older help the younger."

"I like this school. You can get to know people better. In a big school my brother says all he has time to do is go to his locker and get to the next class. Here kids are nice to each other."

The two exceptions to this view were those of children who previously had attended larger schools:

"In my other school [a large, graded one] there was way more things to do. We had two hundred swings, monkey bars, a spider, and a rocket. Here we don't have too many books."

"I liked it when I was in one grade. Here it is hard to remember what grade you're in. It's confusing."

Lodi is larger than many other one-room schools. A nationally conducted study (Muse, Smith, and Barker, 1987, p. 16) notes that in 1983-84, enrollments in one-room schools ranged from one to sixty-five children, with half recording fewer than ten pupils and 90% with fewer than twenty students. Ethnic subgroup enrollment in these schools was minimal or nonexistent, as in Lodi.

Talbert, Fletcher, and Phelps (1987, pp. 11-12) found that many educational advantages and disadvantages result from the size of small schools. Advantages cited were: (a) flexible, individualized instruction, (b) cooperation, (c) the absence of bureaucracy, (d) known school board members, (e) teachers' feeling of control, and (f) the integral place of a school in small communities. Disadvantages included: (a) teacher shortages, (b) increased teacher duties and responsibilities, (c) poor salaries, (d) administrative difficulties, (e) declining enrollments and revenues, (f) a lack of pre-school and kindergarten programs, and (g) isolation. This study of Lodi School found many of the same advantages and disadvantages.

## ADVANTAGES OF A SMALL SCALE

### SCHOOL INTIMACY

A small scale is a "human scale" (Sale, 1982). At Lodi School each individual has a specific, visible role, and the teacher develops and maintains a close relationship with her pupils, their parents, and the community. Children form extended, multiage friendships.

**Pupil-Teacher Bonding.** As the only teacher, Anne interacts with the same pupils for years, establishing a closer relationship with her pupils than teachers in larger schools where children change classrooms annually. Prolonged pupil-teacher interaction is a major attribute of a one-room school and results in what Bell and Sigsworth (1987) refer to as an "extended bond." This bond allows the teacher to meet children's academic needs more effectively. One mother of a boy who moved to Lodi said she feels her son is receiving a better education in Lodi because of the individual attention given to him. She commented that his previous teachers in the larger schools he had attended "really didn't know how he was doing."

In multiclass schools the teacher must devote the beginning of each year to becoming familiar with a classroom of new faces. During her first year at Lodi, Anne also had to adjust to a new class, but she will lose little time in establishing routines and determining instruction levels during her subsequent years at the school. She will not have to refer to a file for information on a child, for she already will be intimate with all but a few new students, and many of the new children will be siblings of children already in her class. Because of Lodi's small size, Anne knows the parents of most of the children who will become additions to the class. Newcomers are integrated into the classroom quickly.

The intimacy of a one-room classroom gives children a sense of security and continuity. When Rudolf Steiner designed his



Waldorf School model, he planned for each class to have the same teacher for eight years, for he felt it crucial for children to have an adult, in addition to parents, who can offer a model for behavior and stability. Thus, a child develops a special bond with a teacher in addition to that formed with parents. Steiner perceived that a child's personal relationship with a teacher is more important than exposure to materials or methods. His model is utilized in some schools today in the United States and Europe, and his views are considered to be progressive. What Steiner proposed occurs naturally in Lodi.

**Connections among Pupils.** The relationships among the Lodi children are different from those in a graded school. First, the transition to a new school year is simplified, for the few new pupils model their behavior after the older students who already are familiar with the classroom. The older children relish their role as transmitters of classroom expectations and information. With an air of importance, one pupil related the following: "It is fun to help first-graders with work if they don't understand."

Nellie feels the mix of ages in the class is one of its biggest assets:

It is far more truer to life. I mean, you start in first grade and there's a psychological pecking order. The older kids kind of watch out for the unhealthy little ones until they grow up, and it's their turn to take over. That's what life is all about, learning to get along with all ages, not learning to get along with all the "age ten" students.

A one-room school's multiage groupings usually include siblings. During the 1987-88 school year, eleven of the nineteen Lodi students have at least one sibling in the classroom. When asked whether they like having brothers and sisters in the same room, these pupils appeared puzzled as if they had not thought of this question before. After some

contemplation, one girl responded, "I like it. They share stuff with you like paper and pencils." One result of siblings being in the same class is that both good and bad tales always have been carried home to parents about progress and behavior. Lula reported the following incident from when she taught in Lodi in 1935: "An eighth-grader came to school drunk from apple cider. I was so mad. His sister squealed on him. It never happened again."

Peer-tutoring traditionally has been necessary in order for the teacher to provide for diverse learning levels. Muse, Smith, and Barker (1987, p. 14) found 70% of all contemporary one-room schools use peer-tutoring, and 95% use individualized instruction. Peer-tutoring has many benefits, for it requires students to be independent and to demonstrate caring for each other. Older students show compassion, patience, and self-confidence, as they take on the characteristics of the teacher's role. Lodi children find caring for each other to be as normal as doing an arithmetic assignment or writing a story. It is commonplace to see older pupils giving a young child a comforting hug or words of encouragement. A new student to the school said, "I like it better here. The kids take care of each other. It is not like in New Jersey where the sixth-graders beat up the little kids." It likewise is common for older children to correct the young. A fourth-grader would not allow a seven-year-old to follow the words in a book with her finger while she was reading.

In a small school, each student has a special place. The shy child can't hide in a crowd; if any child attempts to withdraw, another pupil will force the reticent participant to join in any group activity which is occurring. Lodi School is an extended family in which quarrels occur much like those within a typical biological family. When disagreements occur, the controversies are addressed immediately, for in a small setting they cannot be hidden or avoided.

Children share responsibility for the classroom. Anne emphasizes each child's "role" within the school family. Older students possess a special status, yet every child is assigned a chore, ranging from putting up the flag to vacuuming. This results in the children feeling a sense of ownership for the school; however, this ownership does not translate into possessiveness. Children readily share their desks and materials.

Cooperation permeates the atmosphere, and children consider themselves as "Lodi kids" not as "fourth-graders." Historically, competition has occasionally existed between pupils, but "not until teachers began to instruct large groups of students in classes, however, do we find that they consciously and casually promoted competition in order to induce their charges to learn" (Finkelstein, 1970, p. 113).

Teacher-Parent Interaction. Anne not only is tied closely to her students, but also to parents with whom she has a comfortable, informal relationship. Some parents were childhood schoolmates of hers. Many of her current friends are parents or relatives of children in the classroom. It is more difficult for a teacher in a small town to compartmentalize his or her interactions with other people than it would be for a teacher in a larger setting where interactions in and out of school involve people who may not even be acquainted with each other. This familiarity allows Anne to be more sensitive to her students. She noted, "It helps me be more patient."

Most parents respect and cooperate with Anne, as they did with her predecessor, Nellie, who said, "The secret of one-room schools—why they should be kept—is that they're partnerships." Parents have a familiar, ongoing relationship with the school. Visiting the classroom is not a special or traumatic experience, for parents visit the school routinely. Nellie said, "A teacher must get used to [it] and realize they are not

interfering. They're here for the interest of their kids." Most parents are very supportive of the teacher. One parent said, "If kids have homework, the parents would see to it that they do it." When the children are on the playground, usually at least one passing car will toot its horn and a parent, neighbor, or relative waves to the children.

The teachers occasionally visit students' homes. Nellie said:

I often went to their houses, because I knew where they were coming from, and I met them on their ground. Even if there were flies on the coffee and bread they offered me, I took it, because it made the woman feel important. It was what was expected.

#### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Anne not only is familiar with each individual child and his or her family but also with that child's neighbors, friends, and often other relatives. She knows everyone in the community, as they also know her. Her visibility is greater than it would be in a larger city where teachers exist as anonymous members of a profession.

Lortie (1975) found that teachers are attracted to the profession because of a desire to work with people and a wish to be of service to a community. Carlson and Matthes (1985) found that rural teachers are more concerned about their community than their urban or suburban counterparts. In his study of four exemplary, small, rural high schools Matthes (1987) found:

1. The teachers perceived the school as an integral part of the community.
2. The teachers perceived their efforts as transcending the immediate . . . and had a sense of mission.
3. Community expectations for students and teachers were clear.
4. Achievements of teachers and students were recognized.



5. Teachers had a sense of empowerment, self-worth and efficacy.
6. Teachers were committed to professional growth and demonstrated entrepreneurial skills.

Nelson (1987) examined some of these same factors, finding that when rural teachers moved to larger schools, they felt a loss of mission and felt less involved with their community and "no longer stood out as the sole embodiment of knowledge for a delimited community" (p. 11).

Almost everyone in the Lodi community—parents, administrators, kids, and teachers—mentioned the "family" aspect of the school. There was great emphasis on "our" school, not "the" school; and "we" do this in our school, not "they" do it. The community feels a strong attachment to the school. One parent said, "It's here. It's ours."

In past years, most Lodi teachers had ties to the community. An eighty-five-year-old Lodi farmer remembers one Lodi teacher who "played ball and went fishing with us at night. He went around where we was. Back then the teacher went out with the kids." He also remembers a woman who boarded around and later raised turkeys when she got her own place. "You'd do anything for her. She was right around with you. I helped her get her hay in." In the schoolroom, however, the farmer says the teacher was recognized as master.

Anne's familiarity with the people, community expectations, local practices, and available resources is an asset as she plans for the particular needs of the Lodi children. In turn, the community accepts Anne as a known person whom they can trust. As the school year progresses, not all community members agree with the changes taking place, yet I never hear anyone question Anne's intentions.

The teacher's life outside of school also is interwoven with the community. Nellie taught Sunday school, was a 4-H leader, and belonged to a women's church group and the local historical

society. Anne coaches a baseball team and pursues personal interests. Three generations of Anne's family still live in the Coolidge Valley.

Lodi residents also have special feelings about the school building. The schoolhouse provides a meeting place and serves as a symbol of community life, but it is not the regular meeting place for dances and parties as it was fifty years ago. One elderly resident claimed, "Parents supported schools even more then, because they didn't have so many places to go."

#### DIRECT COMMUNICATION

As a result of the intimate relationships of the teacher, pupils, parents, and community members, issues are discussed openly. Lodi children are involved with each other's progress, behavior, and the general well-being of the school. During sharing time, students exchange information about what they've learned and what is happening outside of school. Typical sharing ranges from students enthusiastically clapping for a first-grader who reported that she had read her "first real big book" to very personal accounts.

Words used to describe existing classroom relationships differ from large schools. Anne and Evelyn talk to the children about their "friends" and never refer to "the other children" or "students." The sort of labeling that occurs in many contemporary institutions seldom occurs at Lodi, even when children are placed in federally funded programs. The teacher who provides special education services for the school reported that phrases such as "two years below grade level" are never used. Children are referred to in personal terms, not as representatives of a larger group.

Communication is a vital part of the interaction between the teacher and others in the community. According to Nachtigal (1982, p. 270), rural areas differ from urban areas, because most exchanges between individuals are oral instead of written,

and more focus is placed on who says something than what is said. At Lodi Anne conducts formal parent conferences twice a year and other conferences as needed. However, most communication with parents occurs as they drop off and pick up their children. The music teacher said, "People are sensible and agreeable here. That's true of a small situation. Communication is easy. If I need to talk to someone, I do so." A parent drew the same conclusion, "If something came up, I'd know about it." On the other hand, no principal or secretary acts as a buffer between Anne and visitors to the school. Outsiders walk straight into the classroom. The UPS delivery person interrupts lessons to obtain signatures for packages.

Anne must be careful about conversations outside of school. General comments are quickly associated with a particular student even when a child's name is not used and specifics are not provided. Even offhand comments such as, "Whew, one of the students acted up today," are interpreted on a personal level. Basically, the teachers cannot discuss school events in any way except in benign references such as, "We're having a Thanksgiving feast on Wednesday."

#### FLEXIBILITY

Because instruction is individualized, it is adapted to the child's level. The grade placement of a child is not what determines what lessons he hears; rather, the teacher provides instruction according to a child's ability. Comments Nellie:

With multiage grouping you let them work at their potential. I don't care what grade they're in. In fact, when Will [the superintendent] called to ask how many kids I had in fifth- and sixth-grade, I had to say, "Just a minute, I've got to get my book, I'm not sure," because I only think of them in grades when I do my registering in September and again in June. Kids work at their potential. They aren't shunned because they are too smart or too dumb. You just work with different kids. Last year I had a second-grader and a fourth-grader working together in math.

A small school avoids complex, hierarchical policies and procedures. This lack of bureaucracy allows Anne to devote her energy to teaching. Situations in small communities tend to be more "nonbureaucratic" (Nachtigal, p. 270). At Lodi, children go out unchaperoned to raise or lower the flag. Pupils may be on the playground unsupervised before school or at noon if the teacher has some task that demands her attention inside. According to the Title 10 specialist, children receive special services sooner in the fall, because testing is easier to schedule and conduct. The provision of services is "more relaxed, less stressful" because more is done "one-on-one" instead of in groups, which are necessary in larger schools.

The Lodi Parent School Club and school board meetings are informal. At one school board meeting, Anne expressed a concern that the roof over a small, back addition to the building had a leak. The next day a school board member was on the roof patching the hole. No formal bidding or administrative procedures guide practices, only the board's discussion and vote need occur. If a problem arises, the quickest, easiest solution is chosen. Decisions are made on practicality, not on written guidelines. The chair of the Lodi school board pointed out that bigger institutions have more momentum when projects are initiated, but that change is easier and quicker when a small scale is involved. She said, "People don't like change generally, so when there are more people, it takes more to bring about changes."

The classroom also benefits from the flexibility that results from the nonbureaucratic nature of small institutions. If Mr. "R.," the school cook, has a meeting at lunch time, the children eat early. When he wants to go deer hunting, a mother fills in for him. If an unexpected, warm spring day stimulates a desire to be outside, the class schedule can be changed so that activities can be pursued outdoors. Whatever the teacher considers reasonable, she can do as long as she is willing to



deal with any questions or comments which might arise from parents, townspeople, or school administrators.

A one-room schoolteacher's tasks are quite diverse. According to Nachtigal (1982, p. 270), rural areas differ from urban areas, because residents must be generalists, not specialists. Teachers in small schools are closely tied not only to a child's learning, but also to the child's entire well-being, including manners, health, and social interactions. Teachers provide clothing to children who need it, instruct children on table manners and on hygiene, and encourage friendships. During the year, I saw Anne cut a child's hair and treat minor medical problems with parental knowledge and consent.

The diversity of Anne's job makes it not only interesting but also demanding. Supervisor Hugh Thompson noted that a small scale allows the teacher a chance to be creative, to "make things happen," to experiment and try things that "bigger schools dictate." He went on to say that in most large schools, "Usually time is a constant and knowledge is a variable. Here, knowledge is a constant, and time is a variable." Thus children keep at individualized tasks until they master them instead of being driven in unison by a graded framework. As one parent said, "People don't learn in straight lines. A one-room school allows children to learn in a crooked line." Anne noted, "It doesn't matter what year they're in. They just have me again the next."

#### DISADVANTAGES OF A SMALL SCALE

##### **A LACK OF OPTIONS**

The small scale of Lodi School restricts opportunities. Alternatives are especially limited in the areas of teacher selection, use of building space, peer relationships, and curriculum. A number of problems exist.

**Pupil/Teacher Conflicts.** The success or failure of a one-room school depends greatly upon the teacher. If the teacher is caring, competent, and energetic, a child's school experience will be positive; however, a bad relationship can result in disastrous consequences. Not only are there no alternatives for a child during any particular school year, but there are also no options for the student's entire elementary school experience. Each child's well-being rests on the qualifications and personality of one specific teacher. Even a capable teacher, who provides a good program for a majority of the pupils, may not be able to meet the needs of all the different abilities and personalities within the classroom. When there is a personality conflict between a child and the teacher, the resulting situation is damaging for both. There are no "outs" when the teacher-pupil relationship isn't working. A parent may send a child to school in another town, but for most, this really isn't an option because of transportation difficulties.

A specialist who said having the same teacher for six years is a "whole mental trip" related the following:

There's this young man in town. When I met him, he said, "Yes, I'm one of those people who absolutely suffered for having the same teacher for six years. It was sheer hell for me. It ruined my entire life. I never learned to read."

**Building Space.** The physical setting of a one-room schoolhouse is restrictive. The children spend the entire day together in the same room, without a break. Unlike larger schools, Lodi offers no library, lunchroom, music or art rooms, gym, or office. Furthermore, the pupils stay in the same room for all their elementary experience, not just one school year. Breaks occur only when the children go outside for recess or gym or when they go to the town meetinghouse for gym during the winter. Most small schools in Vermont are housed in old buildings which have a variety of problems.

Limited Pupil Peer Groups. Students in a one-room school often lack a peer group of those the same age. During this particular school year, the Lodi children are evenly distributed by age and sex; however, the previous year there was only one girl in the fifth grade. Once identities are established, it is difficult for students to break out of the pattern that has been set. Students can't "start a new year" with a different group of peers in a changed environment each fall. There is no option of separating two children who may have a bad influence on each other. Problems cannot be distributed among several classrooms.

Difficulties with Curriculum. It is difficult for Anne and other one-room schoolteachers to plan, implement, and evaluate all the different lessons which must occur daily. Nellie said, "I had nineteen children last year in five grades. I don't care whether you've got three grades or five grades; you have nineteen levels there." However, the ability levels which must be taught obviously increase with each additional grade. When one teacher's energy is extended over many different levels and topics, it takes extensive organization, pupil cooperation, and stamina to keep children on task. During the current school year in Lodi, math, spelling, and reading are taught primarily in small groups or in individualized lessons. Science and social studies are presented to the entire class although some assignments may be altered for the different levels. Therefore, Anne can't repeat unit topics each year as many grade school teachers do. Many "canned" materials are not appropriate for a teacher of multiage students, for they are geared to one instructional level. Common guidelines such as the expectation that fourth-graders will study Vermont history and geography cannot apply.

## LACK OF PRIVACY

Several children mentioned that one thing they most disliked about Lodi School was the noise in the classroom. The noise especially bothers the younger children. One said, "I don't like how noisy it is usually." Because so many activities occur simultaneously, there are many distracting sounds which can interfere with a child's concentration. At any given moment in the school day, a visitor may observe a special educator working with an individual in the corner, Anne instructing one group of children, Evelyn interacting with another group, and other children working individually or in pairs. Except for a tiny table in the back room, there is no place to escape the constant activity.

This lack of privacy within the school classroom is not unusual. Most large school classrooms also lack any places where a child can go to be alone. The difference at Lodi is that there is no place for anyone to have privacy. Anne has no teacher's room or school office where she can go to relax, take a telephone message, or talk with someone. When a parent conference is scheduled before or after school or at lunch time, all the children know that a particular child's parent has come to talk with the teacher. Because the conference takes place in the classroom, the teacher and parent are interrupted by children going through to the bathroom, finishing their lunches, or making up work. If Anne wants to confer with Evelyn or one of the specialists, they must stand off in a corner to talk in hushed voices. Anne tried to alleviate the problem by having her husband make a door to the back room, but this helps only slightly. The dishwasher swishes away every afternoon; the old copy machine occasionally clunks out papers; and noises from the classroom tape player, computer, or telephone interrupt children's work.

The teachers struggle with the problem of privacy within and outside of the school. One specialist teacher admitted



that she always is aware of her teacher role when she is in public and that it "inhibits" her. She finds it difficult to talk about school for fear that she might breach standards of educational confidentiality. Anne and Evelyn find it difficult to escape from constant community expectations and from their own attachment to the school. Evelyn said, "It's hard to live in Lodi. I get too emotionally involved, and I get upset." Evelyn's own children have Lodi students at their house frequently for dinner or overnight stays.

The small-scale attributes of intimacy and community involvement encroach on the teachers' personal lives at times; yet Anne notes that the privacy issue is complex:

I can go outside and there's no one around our house. I can go out and mow the lawn with music blasting and not interfere with anybody else's space. In the city you can't do that. Yet I can walk through a city and be anybody I want, because no one knows me. It was difficult to give that up when I came back.

Growing up in a small town, I learned the lesson of keeping my mouth shut. If I don't want others to know, I don't tell anybody. So I still have privacy if I don't step outside of that. There's an image people expect you to uphold, but they also expect me to be human, so it's OK. On weekends I go to the store in jogging pants.

Small communities never have allowed their teachers to have much solitude. Lula Davisson, who taught in Lodi in 1935, said, "If a teacher went out with a certain guy, your name was mud. You had to watch what you did. Townspeople would watch the lamp in the parlor if they knew you were having company." She said that the community would "watch every move you'd make." One parent even attended a school board meeting to complain, "What is the teacher doing at school at 5 P.M., wasting money by having the lights on?"

The topic of privacy pervades all aspects of living in a small community. One parent mentioned that the best thing about Lodi School is that all the children know each other so well, but he continued in the same breath that the worst thing



is that no one can hide anything either. Family issues are discussed openly on the playground or referred to in the classroom. A few parents admonish their children not to discuss private matters at school, and a first-grader was reduced to tears by an older brother scolding him for telling something about their family during sharing time. But for the most part, the students' involvement in each other's lives is a natural, expected part of their existence.

### INSULARITY

Lodi's small size and its related attribute, isolation, are viewed positively by many Lodi residents. Muse, Smith, and Barker (1987) described some of the benefits: "The remoteness of the school is a blessing, because the children can socialize at their own level, draw on their own talents, have time to think, and use their imaginations" (p. 6).

On the other hand, some Lodi children have little understanding of life outside of their insulated community. Several Lodi students think the school is large, for it is all they know. One said, "It's big. It's got a lot of people in it." Another said, "It looks big on the outside." Nellie described the issue of provincialism:

In a rural school your kids come out of a home setup which is pretty shielded. It's kind of one step towards going out in the world, but there's a contact, a cooperative effort. And if you have kids from grades one through five or six, they learn something about who they are. They should be less apt to get lost in the forest.

To counteract this insularity, Anne and her predecessor, Nellie, try to take the children on one extended field trip each year. The last year she taught, Nellie took the two older grades to New York City, admitting that the trip was her first visit to the city. In June 1988, Anne and Evelyn arranged a three-day trip to Burlington, Vermont. Students who were "experienced travelers" helped guide those who were not, as the

neophytes wondered about things such as why the group would go "window shopping," since they had no need to buy windows.

Most Lodi children today are more knowledgeable about life outside of their community than children were fifty or a hundred years ago. One sixty-year-old resident remembered that when she attended Lodi there was one girl who "lived up on the ridge, so she didn't have a chance to play with other children. When she started school, she wouldn't talk out loud to the teacher, because she was bashful, so I heard all her lessons for the first year." No such extreme cases exist today.

For the most part, present-day Lodi students also have little difficulty making a transition to Glencliff School when they "graduate" from Lodi, although several adults mentioned that they had difficulties making a transition to Glencliff as teenagers. One said, "I never felt at home in Glencliff. I always was an out-of-towner." Another said, "They didn't want us. We had mean fights." A third said, "They don't care about Lodi. We didn't fit in. It was a whole different ballgame. Here if you got in the door, you were in the right room." Nellie said, "Lodi always was at the end of the line. The bigger look down on feeder schools." Now most children look forward to the change and adjust well to their new setting even though they are a little apprehensive about the change.

#### LIMITED RESOURCES

Providing adequate school resources is a challenge for Lodi and other Vermont rural areas. According to Nachtigal (1982, p. 270), rural areas differ from urban areas because residents usually are poorer and must "make do" and "respond to the environment" instead of being able to do "rational planning to control environment." The Lodi community struggles to provide necessities for the classroom. There is little money for "extras." The school has a computer system, audio-visual equipment including a VCR and television, a photocopy machine,

a catalogued library, a mixture of old and new textbooks, and an adequate variety of instructional aids. Although the building is old, it is well lighted and heated.

Nellie felt town finances would determine the survival of the school, and she carefully weighed each classroom expenditure. She believed that by modeling frugality she could teach children to be less materialistic. She would not purchase anything which she could make or substitute, for, "Why buy Cuisenaire rods when we have woodworkers in town?" She only requested "books, pencils, and paper. That's it. What more does a teacher need? You don't need a supply catalog."

Anne does not hesitate to photocopy thirty to forty pages to create a book for one child if she feels he needs it, but she also is aware of limited town resources. Both Anne and Nellie have made many classroom aids and have purchased items with their personal funds. Both are effective scroungers and arm-twisters, and each has written small grants with varying success. Nellie convinced the town of Glencliff to pay for the vocal and instrumental music instruction for Lodi School for two years, arguing, "We are a feeder school for Glencliff, so if our kids haven't had music, then your program will suffer."

Vermont state enrollment regulations restricting the number of students per teacher to twenty-five complicate school budgets and planning in small towns. The limit requires towns like Lodi to tuition students to neighboring towns. This is costly; \$123,850 of the \$201,175 proposed school budget for the 1987-88 school year is allocated to tuition. Transportation costs are estimated at an additional \$14,200. Current building regulations almost prohibit small schools from adding on to existing buildings. A one-teacher school was told that parking space for ten school buses would be required if it expanded. Another was not allowed to build a wooden addition. An elevator was required for a newly built two-room school.

Anne is paid less than many teachers in neighboring schools although she has additional responsibilities. Both she and Nellie are affected by the financial limitations of the town. Nellie said:

I never asked for a raise. [The superintendent] was instrumental in getting raises for me. Lodi was a very poor town at that time. Now it has a lot of younger people. I always figured they could not afford to pay me any more. They would pay me what they could afford and what they thought I was worth.

Finances are a major issue in any discussion concerning the future of Lodi School. One parent observed, "It irritates me. The school costs so much. But the teacher doesn't make money. The building hasn't changed. The books are the same. So I don't see why it costs so much."

#### INEFFICIENCY

Many of the necessary teaching and administrative tasks for a school are the same whether it is small or large. Fuller (1982, p. 194) noted that one of the greatest arguments presented for the consolidation of small schools is efficiency. Superintendent Will Dickinson mentioned that he has an uphill battle coordinating all the boards and staff in his district, "because each town is encouraged to look within and set programs according to [its] needs."

State and federal guidelines are especially time consuming. The recent Public School Approval (PSA) process initiated by the Vermont Education Department has put an extraordinary burden on small schools, as the same number of forms are required of all institutions. The Lodi School has budgeted \$600 for the PSA process next year. In comparison, the school will spend \$450 for its art teacher's salary, \$800 for books, and \$400 for equipment.



Nellie is especially vocal in her frustration over state regulations. She agrees that the state should "keep an eye on education" but that many requirements "stink." She said:

The state does more in closing these schools than anything else, because the state requires the same safety measures for ten kids as it does for a thousand kids. This is absolutely asinine, because the safety of ten kids is just as important as that of the thousand kids, but you don't need the same requirements. The state makes no allowances. They take no consideration of the size of school, students, or community. They try to put us in a mold and kill what's unique.

The small population of Lodi makes planning difficult. Statistical analysis is a problem, because figures change dramatically from one year to the next. For example, the 1980 U.S. Census data on children from 0 to 6 years old in Table 3 show how projected new school enrollment figures vary widely from year to year. School enrollment thus fluctuates considerably. Evelyn remembered that about five years ago, the school lost six sixth-graders, but got in four new third-graders over the summer. These changes have a dramatic effect on the make-up of the classroom. As Anne commented, "It definitely is easier when you have the older kids in the class. You can pair them off."

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Table 3

1980 Lodi Population Figures for Ages 0-6 Years

<u>Age</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Total</u>
Under 1 year	11	4	15
1 and 2 years	3	3	6
3 and 4 years	4	7	11
5 years	3	6	9
6 years	1	0	1

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Source: Vermont State Data Center, 1982.



Anne is greatly affected by Lodi School's small scale. Although she is frustrated by the limitations of the school's size, she is convinced of the benefits of one-room schools, and she has made personal sacrifices to remain at the school. At the end of the 1987-88 school year, a neighboring town offered Anne a position with an increase in salary of approximately \$1,500 and fewer responsibilities. Evelyn was offered an increase from \$6.50 to \$10.00 per hour, plus a substantial increase in benefits to come with her. The two teachers rejected the offer and plan to return to Lodi.



### III.

## THE SCHOOLMARM'S ISOLATION AND INDEPENDENCE

*Anne's on her own except for support people. She runs the show. She's got her own world out there.*

-Hugh Thompson, Lodi Supervisor

### ISOLATION

The Coolidge Valley is separated from other areas of Vermont by mountains that are so steep that during winter months the sun shines on the sole highway which traces the valley floor for only a few hours around noontime. Vermont is one of the most rural states in the United States according to Bureau of Census figures, and Lodi is located in a remote area of the state. Isolation is a negative aspect of teaching in a one-room setting.

Like all teachers, Anne Martin is sustained intellectually, socially, and psychologically by support from others including parents, town residents, pupils, and other educators. Although Anne experiences less isolation than former Lodi teachers, her feelings of aloneness are a constant reality. Community support and interest have remained strong throughout the history of schooling in Lodi, and Anne is in close contact with those who live within the town. However, her social and cultural options outside of the valley are limited. Professional isolation also provides great difficulties for teachers in small-school settings, and this proves to be true in Anne's case.

In a study of the problems and challenges facing teachers in rural settings, Oswald, Burianyk, and Gougeon found that nearly half the problems identified were related to the issue of isolation (1983, pp. 1-2), including: (a) a sense of

loneliness and isolation; (b) inclement weather and transportation difficulties; (c) difficulty in establishing regular communications with peers and district staff; (d) inadequate and/or slow resource services; (e) a lack of support in dealing with special-needs children; (f) a need for counseling skills (both student and adult); (g) a heavy supervision load with no relief.

Anne experiences most of these problems, especially the feeling of isolation and problems with transportation, communication, weather, and resource availability. Twenty-one percent of the Lodi pupils meet federal and state guidelines for assistance during 1987-88 compared to a national average of 12% (reported by Superintendent Dickinson), and though her school district provides excellent support for children who qualify for special help, Anne must be knowledgeable about special-needs children, since she has primary responsibility for their education. She also spends a great deal of time on school administrative tasks.

Although rurality may contribute to feelings of isolation, the term simply means "set apart" (Davis, 1987, p. 11). Isolation may be physical, social or psychological, or intellectual, evidenced by the sparse availability of professional stimulation and confirmation. Lodi School experiences all three types of isolation.

#### PHYSICAL ISOLATION

Physical isolation is a major element in the existence of most rural schools even though modern communication and transportation systems lessen the impact of seclusion. Lodi is affected by its geographic features. No roads cross the mountains which border the east and west edges of town. Anyone traveling north must pass through ten miles of winding road lined with cliffs and small waterfalls. Going south, the sole highway bisects the Coolidge Valley as it passes through

Woodsville and Glencliff. Almost half of the acreage in town is national forest land.

Isolation has a significant, ongoing impact on Anne. It is difficult for her to obtain materials for the classroom. A round trip to the central office of the Steuben Southwest Supervisory Union School District takes an hour and a half of traveling time in good weather. Instead, Anne borrows what she can from teachers in Woodsville and Glencliff, and a small community library in Glencliff supplements the school book corner.

A lack of community services affects day-to-day school life. When a child fell on the playground, the teachers carefully debated whether the child should see a doctor, for the nearest medical help was an hour's distance from the school. A teacher's aide helps in emergency situations such as this; however, many one-room schools have only one adult, further complicating safety issues should difficulties arise.

Improved communication systems solve some problems related to isolation yet create others. Anne telephones parents, administrators, or anyone else as she wishes. The disadvantage is that others also call her whenever they want, with no consideration of what she might be doing. Older children in the classroom politely answer the phone; however, usually callers either are unfamiliar with the school and ask for the person in charge or else they wish to speak to Anne. Anne complained, "Don't people realize how hard it is for me to come to the phone?"

Field trips which are commonplace in larger elementary schools become major undertakings in Lodi. The town's transportation contract with a local bus company provides for conveyance of pupils only after school, hence all school trips depend on volunteer drivers. The Coolidge Valley provides many interesting environmental areas for learning experiences, but typical field trip sites such as museums, municipal services,

or businesses are located some distance away. Except for school district administrators who visit occasionally, the school has little contact with those outside of the Coolidge Valley, and outsiders have scant interaction with those who work at and attend the school.

Geographic isolation always has been a major issue in the existence of small schools in Vermont. In December 1854, a Rutland Herald reporter wrote the following:

Each school is a lonely thing. It has no connection with any other school. Its teacher is not heard of, and hears not from his fellows. The State has left him to sink or swim as best he may. It cares not for him or his labors. (True and Bandel, p. 87)

Historically, the physical isolation of communities provided the rationale for the founding of most Vermont small, rural schools. During the nineteenth century, small, detached groups of citizens created one-room schools to meet the schooling needs of their children. However, the factor which caused the creation of these early schools endures as a primary issue for them today.

#### SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ISOLATION

Although teachers in rural settings may be physically isolated from other communities and other educators, they often are integrated more into the community in which they teach than their urban counterparts. When asked why she chooses to teach at Lodi, Anne said that she likes the "community spirit" of the school, where she, the parents, and the children can all "learn together." She said, "I never felt that deep an experience coming from another situation."

The intimacy of a one-room school community has a dramatic impact upon Anne's sense of isolation in its social form. Continuous and extensive interaction between Anne and town residents counteracts some feelings resulting from physical detachment. Throughout its history Lodi School has provided



much of the social focus of the Lodi community, and Anne as the school's sole teacher inherits a tradition of town-school synergism. It would be impossible for a one-room schoolteacher to be isolated from the community within which he or she teaches. However, an important factor is Anne's familiarity with the area. Residents readily include her in community events. Thus she is able to avoid the loneliness which new residents often experience.

The children in Lodi School also experience forms of isolation. Playmates tend to be those children who live nearby. Chronological age is not a determining factor for children's friendships either within or outside school hours. Physical proximity affects out-of-school activities. Children who wish to participate in groups such as Girl Scouts, church groups, 4-H, Little League, or other sport teams, have to travel to neighboring towns to do so. Some parents make a concerted effort to ensure that their children are exposed to situations outside the Lodi community. One said:

Small is a value. It depends on how you use it. I like Lodi, yet I try to take my kids other places. There's a whole world out there. Our environment is secure, but limiting. Some children never go anywhere but on field trips. It reinforces cycles in the community rather than breaking them.

In the past, rural, Vermont teachers also were affected by isolation. Lula Davisson described one of her students at Lodi School in 1935:

I had a boy come to school like a little wild animal. He was an only child and never had played with other children. When he came to school, he had a cap on. His mother tried to go home, but he'd run to the door with her. She'd say, "No, you stay." He was scared. I had children go to the board. While he was there, she left.

We had one hour for lunch, so many children went home to eat. His father brought him back. He had a horse whip with him. The boy was named Famous Jackson. I told the boy to go to his seat. The boy wouldn't go, so the father switched his legs. I said, "Come in and find nice things to do." The boy said, "Nope." The father

switched him again. I couldn't butt in, but I didn't know what to do. Finally the boy went in, and I shut the door, but he wouldn't take his hat off. The next day he still had it on. This continued for three or four weeks. . . . He didn't pass that year. He was low and I could never get a pencil in his hand.

Poor communication and transportation were troublesome areas for other former Lodi teachers. David Offensend, who later became superintendent of Burlington Schools, started his teaching career in Lodi in 1935. Noting that many Vermont roads were impassable during certain parts of the year, he related an encounter in March with his district superintendent in Woodsville (Association of Retired Teachers of Vermont, 1975, p. 25). The superintendent was surprised to see his teacher, because muddy roads made travel between towns almost impossible, yet Mr. Offensend was even more surprised to find that his school was supposed to be on vacation that week because of the difficult traveling conditions. The superintendent suggested that he plan to take a week off, so the school wouldn't have to pay the extra week's salary of \$17.00.

Many former teachers were forced to connect with the community because of the custom of "boarding around." Elsbree (1939, p. 288) reported that 68% of all teachers in Vermont in 1862 boarded with a family within their school community. This arrangement allowed teachers to get to know their students and families, yet in many cases the arrangement caused hardships, and teachers often had no say about where they wished to be located. They had little privacy, and sleeping and eating conditions varied widely. Other teachers lived at home or with relatives. Lula Davisson recalled that when she started her teaching career during the 1920s, she was able to live at her family's home, for the Peavine Railway train which passed nearby would slow down enough on its morning run to allow the fireman to grab her and swing her up as the train chugged by. After teaching she returned home on the evening train.

## PROFESSIONAL ISOLATION

Isolation "implies that children may be receiving an education which is less than it should be" (Nias, 1985, p. 117). The underlying assumption concerning rural teachers is that they experience no professional exchanges or stimulation; hence it is easy for them to become stagnant. Therefore, the term "isolated" has negative connotations for most people, evoking images of the "country bumpkin" schoolmaster. When Anne, Nellie, and others connected to Lodi School discussed their concerns about isolation, they usually referred to some aspect of professional isolation.

Bell and Sigsworth's 1987 book on small, rural schools states, "When the rhetoric of rural primary teacher isolation is stereotypically employed, there is implicit in it a stereotypical view of the urban primary school as an isolation-defeating institution" (p. 131). Yet, recent studies show that urban teachers also experience isolation in its social or psychological forms. Teaching is an isolated profession, regardless of its setting (Lortie, 1975; McPherson, 1972; Bell and Sigsworth, 1987). Lortie concluded that the "one teacher, one classroom" tradition creates an "egg crate" system where teacher separation, instead of independence, is encouraged.

Most schooling in the United States occurs in classrooms where a single teacher conducts activities behind a closed door. Generally interaction between teachers occurs only in the hallways, on the playground, or in the teachers' room, but these contacts provide important professional interaction. At Lodi School Anne lacks collegial support.

Ongoing professional training is a problem for teachers in small, Vermont schools. To continue graduate training, Anne must travel at least three hours to take a course. This prevents her from taking late afternoon classes, and means she would arrive home after midnight if she signed up for an evening class. Anne feels the energy drain from traveling

would affect her classroom performance negatively. Lula and Nellie agreed that efforts to continue their education had been difficult.

Problems with isolation appear to come at critical points in a teaching career. Even though Anne had previous teaching experience and was familiar with the Lodi community, she had to utilize every teaching skill that she possessed during her first year of teaching at Lodi School. On occasion Anne accesses support systems that she developed in her former teaching settings. It would be difficult for a teacher with no prior experience to begin a teaching career in a one-room setting. This difficulty would be compounded if that new teacher needed to adjust to the physical isolation of the community in addition to the isolation of the teaching situation itself. Another critical time for teachers in small schools, according to Hugh Thompson, the elementary school supervisor for the school district, is after four to five years, a time "when the walls can close in." According to him, much of the impact of teacher isolation depends on a teacher's personality.

Both Anne and Nellie seem bothered most by isolation in their shared wish for more contact with other teachers. Nellie was instrumental in convincing the school board that a teacher's aide was needed in the classroom. She claims that isolation is the "only disadvantage to the rural school setup," a deficit which could be counteracted only with "good supervision" and the "teacher's personality." "You don't have a teacher's room. Now when Evelyn came in as an aide, it covered a lot of that. But you're really isolated and alone." Anne said:

Isolation is hard, not having any other adults to talk with. From other adults, other teachers, you get feedback, and you can encourage each other. If you have a real bad day and the kids are wired, you wonder, "Is it me, or is it the kids?" It helps to have someone else say, "No, it's all right."



Although professional isolation is less a factor in today's small, rural schools than it was fifty or a hundred years ago, it still greatly affects the existence of any teacher in such a setting. Anne and Nellie repeatedly mentioned it as a great concern to them.

### INDEPENDENCE

Is there any advantage to teaching in an isolated setting? It became evident during this study that isolation allows a teacher to have enormous freedom. Teachers in small, rural schools not only are given a great deal of independence, but the situation also requires these teachers to respond to their teaching contexts as strong individualists. Any teacher who works primarily alone must be personally motivated, self-sufficient, and confident. Historically, she has been able to do pretty much as she has wished within the confines of rare supervisory visits and community expectations. One-room schoolteachers can't retreat from decisions, nor can they "pass the buck." They feel the responsibility for their judgments and must live with the outcomes of their actions.

The teacher at Lodi School possesses many liberties and responsibilities. If Anne finds it more convenient to eat lunch earlier or later, the children do so. If she wants to purchase anything, and money is left in the budget, she orders it. If a problem arises, whether with a child or the building, she takes direct action. Anne sets the daily schedule, selects instructional materials, coordinates instruction and controls the supplies, books, periodicals, and field trip sections of the budget. School policies, procedures, and guidelines are minimal, and Anne has a strong voice in setting these policies in addition to her freedom in turning them into practices. Nelson's 1987 study of women teachers in Vermont recorded a former one-room teacher's view of her independence:



For so many years I had been the one who settled everything. . . . That was one of the hardest things for teachers who had always been in a country school to come into a graded school—because you had to follow rules and regulations. (p.11)

Delamont (1976) found that immediacy and autonomy are interdependent. The independent teacher usually acts with few delays, since the teacher does not need to check with others before making a decision. Former Lodi teacher Nellie valued her autonomy, claiming, "I never missed the gossip and cliques, and I didn't have to worry about polishing the teacher next door." Neither did she have to worry about what the next year's teacher would think, with the exception of those couple of children who "graduated" and moved on to Glencliff High School.

The autonomy of a one-room schoolteacher becomes more restricted as isolation decreases. When others become involved in administrative or supportive roles, teachers give up some freedom to make decisions on their own. In the past a one-room schoolteacher's independence was restricted only by her or his responsibilities to a particular school. Today, Anne and others in her situation have ties to union school districts, to other teachers who come into their classrooms to provide instruction in special areas, and increasingly, to federal and state guidelines.

#### **SUPERVISION AND INDEPENDENCE**

McPherson's 1972 study of small-town teachers found that teachers in these settings have mixed emotions about supervision, wanting both help and freedom at the same time. Obviously, relationships between a rural teacher and her supervisor vary directly according to their particular personalities. Hugh Thompson, the elementary school supervisor for the Coolidge Valley, visits Anne once a week, although they are in contact by phone more often if some special situation

arises. Hugh has served in this supervisory position for five years and has excellent rapport with his teachers. However, Anne has a different relationship with him than Nellie had. As one parent said, "Others worked around Nellie, not with her. Anne goes running to Hugh in situations that Nellie wouldn't have." Anne described Hugh as follows:

He's a link in a chain. I call on and count on him. He's my support system. He directs my energies and shows me things in a way that doesn't make me defensive. . . . He's our [Lodi School's] connection to the valley. Without him, instant isolation will result.

Hugh is able to work with teachers in a way that makes them feel supported, not restrained. Nellie noted that in one-room schools the teacher has "a friendship with the administrator that you wouldn't have elsewhere." Teacher-supervisor relationships are simplified when group dynamics involve only two people rather than the greater numbers found in most school staffings. Hugh views his primary responsibility as a "chance to work together to improve things. I make suggestions and give feedback, but I don't evaluate the teacher, I evaluate the program. We work as a unit, yet I respect the autonomy of each school."

The first state provision for supervision of teachers in Vermont was approved in early 1827. State surveillance survived in various forms throughout the nineteenth century. Local supervision varied. Bush records that midnineteenth-century Vermont superintendents were paid \$1.00 a day for their work, "Compensation . . . so small . . . that the supervision and visiting of the schools was neglected" (1980, p. 20). Lodi records in the 1800s show that most schools were visited once a term.

Elsbree (1939) noted early supervision was usually authoritarian, especially because teachers were untrained, but as teachers became more professional during this century, the supervisory role changed more to one of leadership. When Lula

Davisson started teaching in Lodi in 1935, the supervisor came weekly. Lula feels supervision was more evident then:

The superintendent even used to correct our pronunciation. No one goes into classrooms today. The superintendent has to sit in his office and do paperwork. There's no one to watch. Teachers do what they please.

#### THE EFFECT OF OTHER PROFESSIONALS

A one-room schoolteacher is responsible for the entire school, including other specialists who come to the building. Although the one-room schoolteacher was the sole adult in past classrooms, the contemporary schoolmarm may have many others working with her. The following people visit at least once during a typical week at Lodi School: the school supervisor, a physical education instructor, a music teacher, a special education specialist, a Chapter 1 instructor, a language specialist, the school cook, the hot-lunch clerk, and the school janitor. Most of these positions are recent additions, especially the specialist positions, which resulted from federal programs. Other regular visitors include the superintendent, assistant superintendent, school psychologist, and school nurse.

Lortie (1975, p. 76) claims that teachers generally consider their peers to be their most important source of help when there is trouble in the classroom. This is true for Anne, who views her aide, Evelyn, as an equal with whom she shares ideas and problems. She welcomes specialists into the classroom.

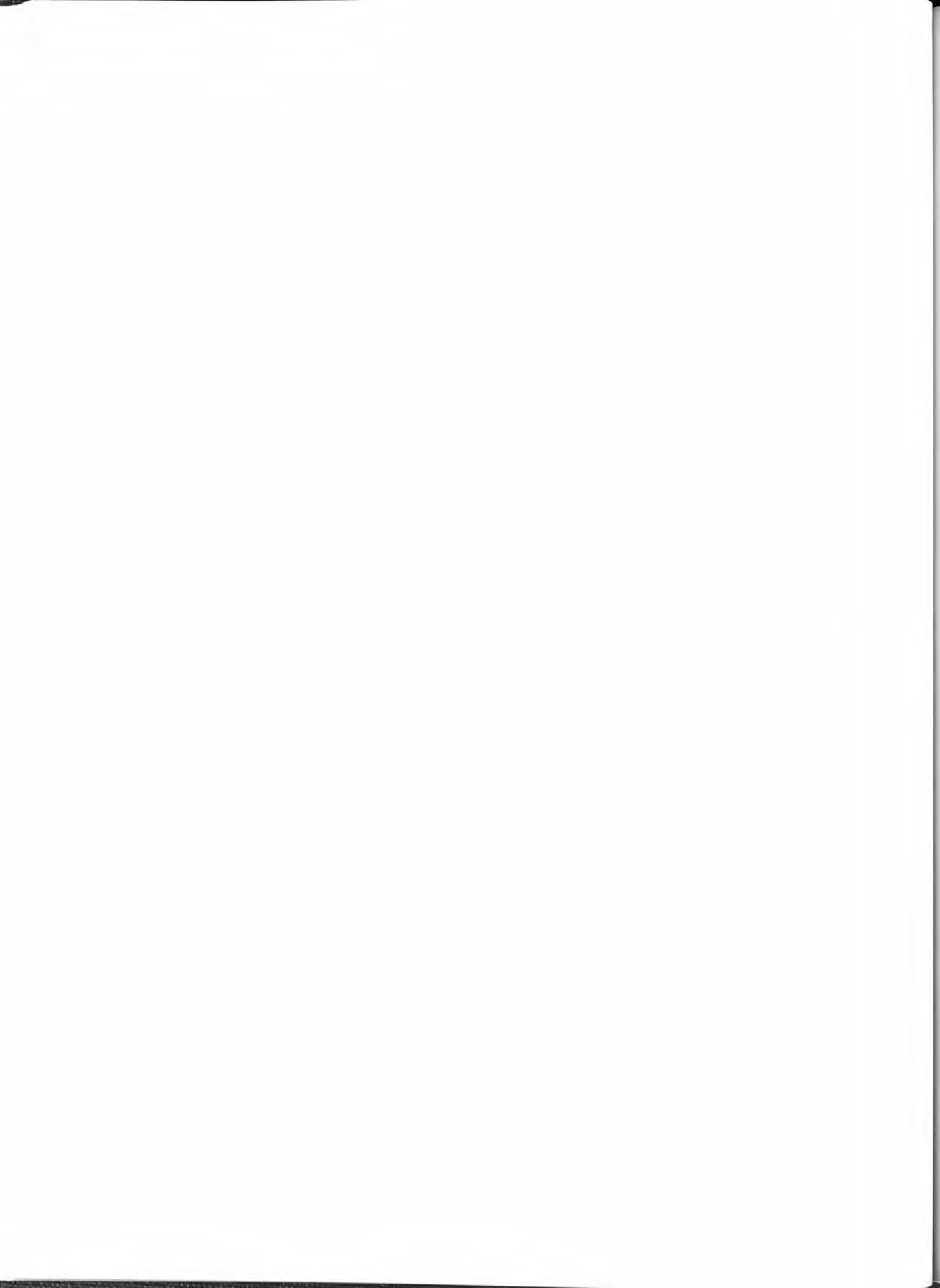
On the other hand, Nellie spent almost all of her professional life in a one-room classroom, and she felt negatively about specialists coming into the school. For most of her twenty-four years of teaching at Lodi, she worked alone with her pupils and took great pride in being the sole provider. In recent years, as more outside specialists entered her classroom, Nellie had to make adjustments which she didn't always like. She felt that the specialists "don't help the feeling of isolation, because they come and go." Nellie was

"reluctant about talking about . . . problems, 'cause they're [the specialists] covering the entire district," and she was afraid that talking to them would violate pupils' rights to confidentiality. She also felt it was hard for children to go in and out of the classroom with different people.

A one-room schoolteacher lacks the socializing influence of other teachers. Schoolmarms neither experience the constraints presented by other teachers, nor do they experience the transmission of skills and knowledge that older teachers possess. Emphasis is placed on trial and error based on previous experiences, reading materials, and brief encounters with a supervisor or specialists who come into the class. She has the opportunity to experiment and try things that larger schools may dictate. Hugh Thompson calls small-school teachers "creative loners who like the excitement of doing their own thing."

Still, the contemporary teacher in a one-room school is different from those who taught there in the past. Most have been trained in larger communities, not country schools. Superintendent Will Dickinson said, "Anne is not as entrenched in her autonomy, because of her own past. She has a higher priority for cooperation and access. Autonomy is a lesser issue." Anne appears to be seeking and establishing wider personal support than her predecessors. She has more autonomy than most teachers in suburban or metropolitan settings, but she is willing to trade some of this independence to counteract the isolation of her small, rural school setting.







#### IV.

### TRADITION VERSUS CHANGE

*Anne lets us do more things. We don't have to eat our pizza and French fries with a fork.*

-Lodi Student, 1987-88

*Times are changing. I like the old days, but I know they're gone.*

-An elderly Lodi native

### COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

Anne Martin encounters strong, often conflicting expectations concerning the preservation of traditions and the initiation of changes in Lodi School. Presumptions of the community, parents, and outsiders significantly influence her as she defines her role as a one-room schoolteacher. These desires, hopes, and demands of others reinforce, or occasionally oppose, the expectations that Anne has for herself.

The date 1857 hanging over the front door symbolizes Lodi School's strong, community heritage. For 130 years, children in Lodi have attended school in this same building, often in succeeding generations. Thirteen of the nineteen current students have at least one parent who attended school in the Coolidge Valley; parents of two of the remaining six children were educated in a neighboring town. Many students also have grandparents or other relatives who were raised and schooled in Lodi. Children are quick to note the school's history:

"It's special 'cause it's so old. If they turned this new, it wouldn't look different from other places."

"My family always went to this school."

"Ma was in school here. Not many kids go to a one-room school. Not many are this old."

Although some Lodi citizens wish to preserve the past, others desire change, especially new residents. Population in

Lodi, as in other small, rural, Vermont communities, was almost unchanged from 1900 until 1950, but for the past few decades, newcomers have brought new ideas from other geographic areas. Lodi's population reveals a split between natives and newcomers, which often is reflected in different expectations of schooling. Many town natives who attended schools in the area value the education they received and want it replicated. One elderly resident explained, "There's no question in my mind that a one-room school always seemed a pretty good school, 'cause that's what we always went to." However, some newcomers have misgivings about their children attending a one-room school and want to modernize the classroom.

It is too simplistic to say that all newcomers want change and that every native wants to preserve tradition in Lodi. Several citizens claim that expectations differ as much between younger and older residents as between natives and newcomers. Generally, elderly natives are the most likely to want to preserve tradition, while young newcomers are the most vocal in wanting changes. Yet, opinions vary widely. One young native commented, "What's good enough for me, is good enough for my kids." Another noted, "Even the building hasn't changed color from when I went. I hope the new teacher will change things."

When Nellie started teaching in Lodi in 1963, she spent her first few years negotiating her identity as the Lodi school-marm. The community developed expectations by which they could predict what would occur in the classroom, and Nellie subsequently did little to surprise them. For two decades she carried out her role in a manner consistent with community expectations and with her own self-perceptions. Upon Nellie's retirement, Lodi was faced with the challenge of reassessing who it wanted for a teacher. Stability and predictability gave way to debate and uncertainty as the town explored traditional values and desires for innovation.

### PRESERVING TRADITION

When she started teaching at Lodi, Anne faced not only the specific expectations of the Lodi community but also the more general traditions which characterize rural America. Gulliford (1984) listed these rural values as: the importance of family, self-reliance, patriotism, and sense of community. Sher and Rosenfeld (1977) found obedience and discipline coupled with "teaching 'the basics' and reinforcing community standards [continue] to be the dominant task of the rural school" (p. 82). These values were reflected numerous times, as I talked with Lodi's citizens, especially "the basics"; hard work and hardship; patriotism, religion, and morality; community school events; and discipline.

### THE "BASIC" CURRICULUM

Although the typical curriculum in rural schools expanded greatly between 1800 and 1925, primary schooling emphasized the three "R's"—'reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Reading and writing started immediately upon a child's entry into school, but "arithmetic was a branch of study considered suitable only for advanced students" (Finkelstein, 1970, p. 67). Throughout the twentieth century, the three "R's" have retained their primary curricular emphasis. During the current school year at Lodi, most of the three-and-a-half-hour morning session is spent on these subjects, along with spelling.

Historically, the first "R," reading, was based on the teaching of phonics. Lula Davisson and Nellie Rempis both favored the "basics," including a strong program in phonics. Nellie said, "It's time teachers taught kids to read. I never changed from the phonics, and I never would as long as I taught. Schools should teach the basics, bring [kids] back to the basics of life."

The second "R," writing, maintained a prominent position in past school instruction. Handwriting was considered to be at

least as important as content in the writing process. According to Finkelstein (1970), pen making was a significant part of writing instruction in the nineteenth century. By 1912, "handwriting is probably the most emphasized subject in the schools" in Vermont (Carnegie Commission, 1914, p. 48).

Instruction of arithmetic focused primarily on numeric computation, commonly referred to as "ciphering." Students were required to memorize definitions, rules, or principles before they were allowed to solve problems (Finkelstein, 1970, pp. 68-69). Fractions were considered to represent the highest level of difficulty in arithmetic (p. 67).

In other subject areas, the primary focus was memorization. According to Gulliford (1984), a student's ability to memorize was demonstrated through the fourth "R," recitation. In her study of teaching behavior between 1820 and 1880, Finkelstein found "only isolated descriptions . . . of teachers whose behavior indicated that they believed the subject matter itself could or should have been presented so that students would find it attractive, interesting or stimulating" (1970, p. 102).

The first reference to curriculum in Lodi town records was an entry on April 24, 1846, by "Superintendent of Common Schools for the County of Coolidge," George Grandy, who stated, "Mr. Nathan P. Brownel has this day been examined and is found qualiffied to instruct in Spelling, Reading, Writing, Geography, Arithmetic, and English Grammer." J. S. Adams, the third secretary of the State Board of Education, wrote the following summary of existing school laws concerning school curriculum in his annual report in 1857:

The general law . . . [provides] for the instruction of the young in orthography, reading, writing, English grammar, geography, arithmetic, history of the United States, and good behavior. (1859, p. 50)

As can be seen in Table 4, early school records in Lodi indicate that most teaching during the nineteenth century



followed the reading, writing, arithmetic, and recitation tradition.

Table 4

Number of Lodi Students Pursuing Particular Subjects  
1870

	Nine Existing Lodi Schools								
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9
Total # of Scholars <sup>a</sup>	33	17	31	11	21	9	21	7	19
Reading	32	17	24	11	18	9	21	7	19
Spelling	32	17	24	11	18	9	12	7	18
Penmanship	0	6	0	7	11	3	0	1	8
Arithmetic	25	16	22	7	12	4	11	2	9
Grammar	9	6	6	2	1	0	3	0	0
Geography	8	10	16	5	10	2	10	1	8
Composition	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
History	1	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	0
Other	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0

Source: Vermont School Registers, [Lodi] Town Clerk's Office.

Note: Dates do not correspond exactly. First-term figures were used for Schools #8 and #9 for they only had one term.

<sup>a</sup>"Scholars" ranged in ages from 4-20 years of age. These figures for the second term, commonly referred to as the "winter term," reflect higher enrollments and include older children who worked during the summer term. For example, School #1 had 7 of 17 students studying arithmetic during the first term and 25 of 33 scholars during the second term.

Between 1880 and 1900, the number of subjects taught expanded greatly, as shown in Table 5 on the following page. However, the "basics" retained primary status throughout the twentieth century. As the Vermont Education Department increased in size and influence, it issued strict guidelines in all areas. A 1907 teacher's manual for the state written by Mason Stone even included a list of endorsed pictures for school walls with the recommendation that each teacher pick "not more than five" of a size 18 by 24 inches (p. 155). The manual prescribed a daily elementary program of twenty-eight



recitations of five to fifteen minutes each, for a total of 285 minutes of instruction. Forty minutes for "intermissions" and thirty-five minutes for "opening exercises, music, writing, drawing, nature study, elementary agriculture, manual training and general exercises" were recommended daily (p. 5). In spite of state efforts, the Carnegie Commission noted:

It is not uncommon to find teachers working without any directions whatever. In some cases girls who graduated from the high school in June begin to teach in the autumn with their entire directions for a year's work with seven or more grades written in lead pencil on a single sheet of paper. (1914, p. 46)

Table 5

Number of Lodi Students Pursuing Particular Subjects  
1890

	<u>Eight Existing Lodi Schools</u>							
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#7	#9	#10
Total # of Scholars	16	21	20	9	22	21	11	25
Reading	16	21	20	9	22	21	11	25
Writing	12	9	20	9	22	21	9	15
Spelling	16	21	20	9	22	21	9	25
Grammar	2	10	1	2	6	0	2	6
Geography	6	9	6	2	13	6	7	15
Government	0	0	1	0	6	1	0	0
Arithmetic	11	20	15	7	17	12	9	20
Drawing	0	0	20	7	0	0	0	0
Physiology	11	19	20	9	12	0	9	21
U.S. history	0	1	2	0	8	0	2	0
General history	0	0	0	0	8	0	0	0
Language lessons	0	0	20	0	0	0	0	1
Map drawing	4	0	0	2	0	0	2	0
Bookkeeping	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Source: Vermont School Registers, [Lodi] Town Clerk's Office.

Note: First-term figures are used here. Although enrollment dropped from twenty to ten in School #3 for some unexplained reason, other enrollment figures for the two terms differed only by three scholars or less. Figures were not available for Schools #6 and #8. Schools #7 and #10 were open only for one term.

According to Fuller, most rural teachers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries taught as they themselves had been taught:

[S]he drilled her students and taught them to memorize because that was the way she had been taught, and because, in her common-sense way, she believed that unless a student remembered what he had learned and could say it, he had not learned it. (1982, p. 202)

So the young, often untrained teacher instructed her students in the basics she herself had learned as a pupil. Fuller points out that what these young teachers may have lacked in knowledge of curriculum was balanced by what they knew about rural schools and country life. They were used to physical work, such as making fires in wood stoves, and understood the backgrounds and needs of their pupils.

School equipment reflected the changing curriculum. The Lodi Corner School bought a Victrola in 1927, and the Village School bought one in 1928. School records show that the teacher taught art, music, and physical education in 1937, along with her other duties. The 1939 annual report of the local superintendent recorded new courses of study for the state in temperance, safety, and social studies (p. 41). His 1948 report states that the teachers in Lodi were "progressive" (p. 36): "Mrs. Davisson attended summer school this past summer, at which time she was very much interested in the Visual Aids Course. A film strip projector has been purchased for the school."

Not only did the school curriculum expand greatly throughout the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, but also teaching methods and materials changed dramatically. Yet, the primary content focus remained on "the basics" of reading, writing, and arithmetic. When she retired, Nellie Rempis left a legacy which emphasized phonetic reading, neat handwriting, and accurate computation of arithmetic problems.

### HARD WORK AND HARDSHIP

The tradition of "hard work" in small, rural communities is taken for granted. In past times children were expected to work diligently in the classroom and to perform chores at home before and after school. Today, only a few of the children in Lodi still work on farms, but most help out in family gardens, stack firewood, babysit younger children, or care for pet horses or other animals. Many Lodi residents, regardless of their age, commented on the importance of labor and responsibility both during and outside of school. Nevertheless, most children have outdoor playtime and spend it swimming in ponds, horse riding, ice skating, skiing, or riding dirt bikes or snow machines.

Survival in rural Vermont required effort and diligence in past decades when most citizens lived off the land in modest circumstances. One resident near sixty years of age remarked that during a typical year her father logged, served as Lodi town clerk, ran a store, and worked in a wood mill. Community folklore contains many accounts of adversity. David Offensend described his Lodi schoolhouse in 1935 as having maple plank seats, a privy, black paint for blackboards, no electricity, a wood stove for heat, and constant flies swarming around food in warm weather. During winter he assigned one of his students to sit with a shovel by a leaky window to shovel out the snow that drifted into the school. One former student remembered, "You could freeze all day before you got done. It usually was cold when you got there, and you never did get your feet warm." A janitor, either "an eighth-grade boy or a man who lived nearby," started the stove in Lula Davisson's school in 1935, but the cold was still so acute in the morning that the first order of the day was square-dancing lessons "to warm the kids up." Only then did the children say the Lord's Prayer, salute the flag, and commence their lessons.

A resident who attended school over seventy-five years ago noted that she rode a horse to school and that children often brought a potato to be heated on the wood stove for their lunch. The school was lit with kerosene lanterns. She commented, "Kids don't know what it's like to get along with nothin'." She then continued:

Teachers didn't always have it easy. I remember one teacher who cooked breakfast for a logging camp, taught, and went home and cooked dinner [for the camp]. It was tough for teachers and kids too, but we had a lot of fun.

What we had to go through then and now—what a difference! Once after a lot of snow, a little fella with new rubber boots which went up to his knees arrived at school with his feet froze to the boots. The snow filled up the boots and turned to ice. We couldn't cut them off, 'cause he wouldn't have anything to wear home. The teacher cried; the kids cried; everyone cried. The teacher sent for a neighbor for hot water and set him in tubs of water to thaw. We picked the ice out. After school, the teacher told the older kids to walk ahead of him to make a path for him. He was in school the next day. I was surprised.

Lula Davisson recounted that during the Depression the United States government provided food, so children could have at least one good meal a day. Mothers who lived near the school took turns cooking corn chowder, beef stew, baked beans, or scrambled eggs in a large kettle which was picked up by two boys at noon and taken to the school.

Health and sanitation were problems. A citizen remembered:

One boy always come to school with a terrible, terrible, dirty shirt. Oh, heavens it was wicked! The teacher finally wrote a note to his mother to have the shirt changed. Wha'd she do? She just turned the shirt inside out, and sent him back.

Health problems show up in attendance records from earliest school records through the twentieth century. The Eighth Health Registration Report (Nichols, 1866) for Vermont in 1864 noted, "Epidemics were common in those early days; in the summer dysentary, in the winter diphtheria plagued the set-



tlers. Children were the usual victims." Illness occasionally caused a school to be closed. It was not uncommon for students to die from their various diseases.

Health continued to be a concern in the twentieth century. A 1914 Lodi school register contained the following note, "This register is tardy as the teacher had half her teeth out and was not in condition to complete it on time." On October 8, 1914, the register recorded that seven children missed school because of "fright at infantile paralysis." From October 2 until November 4, 1918, Lodi schools were closed by the State Board of Health because of Spanish influenza.

Today the Lodi schoolhouse has modern plumbing, heating, and lighting. Chores such as carrying firewood and water have been replaced by vacuuming or watering plants. Children still are expected to be diligent in their school assignments. Nellie considered learning to be a serious commitment with knowledge, not fun, as the focus of the school day. Anne started her first year at Lodi with children who physically and mentally were used to expectations of duty and effort.

#### PATRIOTISM, RELIGION, AND MORALITY

Until the fall of 1987, every school day at Lodi started with the Lord's Prayer and flag salute. Likewise, many student performances were of a religious or patriotic nature. Text-books used in this century indicate that religion and patriotism were an important part of lessons.

As early as 1857, the Vermont Teachers' Association went on record as favoring "daily reading of the Bible in the schools and the introduction of vocal music" (Elsbree, 1939, p. 256). Starting in 1846, entries in Lodi town records by the county superintendent of schools note that teachers certified to teach "sustained a good moral character" (p. 224). It is not clear how this was determined, but the School Journal and Family Visitor (1860) also recorded that teachers were required to be



"of good moral reputation" (Editorial, p. 33). Older citizens said this meant that the teacher "went to church, didn't take a drink, and didn't smoke." One person said that in early times the term indicated that the teacher wasn't married.

When Lula Davisson taught in the town next to Lodi, she was told that she could not have school prayer, so she went to the school board to request approval. She said:

The school board said it was OK if we wanted to, but individual children didn't have to. It's too bad that we don't have prayer now. This year the teacher was doing Pilgrims, and at a special meal to celebrate, one child said, "What? Lord's Prayer? What's that?" Something is missing in a child's life if he doesn't even know what the Lord's Prayer is.

Lula Davisson's concern about religion disappearing from today's schools was coupled with her desire for more patriotism. She feels Memorial Day exercises are too short: "When you talk about the Blue and the Gray now, kids think you're talking about a basketball game."

When she started teaching in Lodi in 1963, Nellie continued the religious and patriotic traditions of the school. The school music teacher related the following about Nellie's class:

The first year I was in Lodi—three years ago—I brought my trumpet, since we were studying brass instruments. I was playing some things, and I asked, "What would you like to hear on the trumpet?" A boy spoke up, "I'd like to hear the 'Star-Spangled Banner.'" That blew me away that any kid would request a song like that, and I said, "Well, sure." I played the first four notes, and every kid in the room rose, faced the flag, and put their hands over their hearts in rigid attention, without a word or smile or any sign that this was anything but the usual. It's unlike this was usual! I whispered to Nellie, "Can you believe it?" thinking it was a joke. She replied, "By God, they'd better have."

Anne Martin has found that many parents and other town residents support the continuation of the rural traditions of religion, patriotism, and morality in school practices.

### COMMUNITY SCHOOL EVENTS

In past years the school not only provided education for the young but also served as a source of community focus, a place where residents could gather. One resident remembered weekly dances the school held: "Things were more neighborly then. Now things move at a faster pace and people don't have time. Few of us had money or cars in the 1930s. If anyone had a car, they couldn't use it in the winter anyways." During these dances, hot chocolate and popcorn often were served. Students sold raffle tickets and held box socials to raise money for school projects. Holidays were celebrated with recitations, performances, or rituals.

### DISCIPLINE

The discipline displayed in contemporary classrooms differs from former times. Many town residents commented on current discipline, but remarks centered upon Nellie, who obviously had a strong reputation as a disciplinarian. Comments included:

"Jimmy [a Lodi pupil] is a banty rooster. He'd rather fight than eat. He needs a firm hand. Nellie'd say, 'Do I need to call your father?' Jimmy knew he'd get taken behind the barn."

"Nellie had control. It was a safe environment. The kids knew what was going to happen."

"The minute Nellie walked in, you could hear a pin drop."

"I made a hole in my arithmetic paper trying to get it right. When she says you gotta do it, you gotta do it 'til it's right."

Nellie exhibited an authoritarian stance with firm external controls. She said, "Self-discipline is not innate. It evolves through guidance. An outside force is necessary for self-discipline to develop." Anne is establishing a more informal atmosphere, which seeks to encourage children to establish their own internal controls. The difference between

Anne and Nellie is best described by a specialist who worked in the class:

Both teachers love kids, but in very different ways. Anne is a people person. She's the epitome of a teacher who loves [children] and loves her job. It shows in everything she does. She tries not to hurt feelings. Her discipline is loving. This year there's a looser atmosphere. Nellie was strict in a no-monkey-business way. She was matriarchal. The classroom was always very quiet and well controlled. They are opposites.

Discipline, whether external or internal, is necessary for a one-room school. The daily schedule is too complex to work without clear rules. The community expects discipline. Nellie commented, "Anne needs discipline. I can see Lodi going downhill, if she doesn't have it. People like discipline and respect. Without it, they won't support the school."

Discipline has existed throughout the history of one-room schools. Popularized accounts often portray a schoolmarm or schoolmaster either being victimized by students or else punishing them. Lula Davisson, who would have to stretch to measure five feet in height, made several comments about the discipline of Lodi School in 1935:

We were a little too strict in those days. We didn't allow whispering. I was lenient. I allowed kids to raise their hand; two fingers up meant they had to go to the bathroom, one they wanted to ask their neighbor a question. I just nodded.

I never spanked anyone, but I took a ruler to one boy. He had a thing that made a cricket sound. I didn't pay attention, didn't catch on. Soon I heard it again. "Elsworth Mundy, take that out of your pocket and hand it to me." When I put the thing in my desk, I took a ruler and hit his hand. "I don't want to hear any more of that." It was the first day of school.

Unless there's something to do, they're gonna' cause mischief. We had one hour off at noon. Why was there so much time to get into trouble? Two boys got on the roof at noon and after lunch couldn't get off. I rang the bell. They couldn't get off. I left them. At four P.M., when I was correcting papers, they finally got down.

One resident remembered his teachers from when he had attended Lodi School fifty years ago: "They had a lot more discipline. They didn't take no back talk. Teachers had a better time then, 'cause [they were] boss. Kids were used to taking responsibility and following directions." Another resident said, "Nine out of ten would get another crack on the pants from their parents when they got home. Teacher was always right. Parents said, 'You better learn.'"

Many accounts of extreme physical discipline exist concerning Vermont rural teachers in the nineteenth century. During this time the teacher rarely distinguished between academic failure and misbehavior, an attitude shared by most parents. Comments entered by visitors into the Lodi school registers focused on the "quietness" or "order" of the room. Entries rarely referred to learning. It was assumed that if the teacher "spared the rod," the children weren't learning (Finkelstein, 1970, p. 103). In 1860, the Vermont superintendent of schools reflected how widespread physical punishment was in the state: "Can it be possible that it has really been necessary to inflict bodily punishment upon one child out of every seven that have ever entered the doors of our school-houses?" (Elsbree, 1939, pp. 237-38).

Finkelstein quoted Hiram Orcutt, a Vermont superintendent of schools and an editor of the Vermont School Journal during the nineteenth century:

It is wrong, it is cruel to turn into the street the stubborn rebellious boy or girl who refuses to be persuaded to submit to authority. . . . The sensible and humane course is to subdue the rebel by whatever severity necessary, and save him to himself, to his family, and to society. (1970, p. 209)

During 1987-88, school traditions of "the basics"—hard work and hardship; patriotism, religion, and morality; community school events; and discipline—provided the basis from which changes were initiated.



### INITIATING CHANGE

Change is evident in Lodi during the 1987-88 school year, because Nellie and Anne differ significantly in age, educational philosophy, and personality. Hugh Thompson, the school supervisor, comments:

Things are changing. We're getting one part of the school which had been there for years and yet a push for changes which new parents thought were important. They were a matter of program design, not the teacher. Nellie had had a top success rate for years and believed in what she [did]. I wouldn't have expected her to make drastic changes, because then she wouldn't have been as effective a teacher. Nellie did accommodate parents' wishes, but the situation had history built into it, and change takes a lot of energy.

Nellie views the transition with mixed emotions:

You get a lot of personal tension when you've been there twenty-four years. You've taught parents of kids coming in. The continuity is important. I think it would be very bad if [children] changed teachers in a rural school every year. I recommended Anne. Anne was one of the ones I kept talking and talking to, to have her come in. I said that she'd be one who would be staying for a while, and I knew she was a good teacher. New ideas, but that was one reason I got out of teaching.

In October 1986, Nellie was selected by the University of Vermont and the Vermont Department of Education as one of 102 "outstanding teachers" in the state. Still, during the last years of her teaching career, Nellie did not do things that she had earlier in her career. In addition, she became frustrated with state regulations, which she felt adversely affected the school: "I can't stop the waves moving over education. I feel futile." This "incredible teacher," who had taught three generations of children in Lodi, looked forward to retirement. Her home is filled with mementos of Lodi School, and she remembers her experiences with pride.



### THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The Lodi community had diverse feelings about Nellie's retirement. Some felt it was time for a change. Others felt she was irreplaceable. In hiring Anne, the school board chose someone who was different from Nellie in teaching methods and philosophy. The board based their choice on what they perceived to be the future needs of their school instead of choosing to replicate what had been successful in the past.

Both Anne and Nellie are strong, independent, caring, and dedicated. Yet in other ways they are very different. Nellie had provided a "status quo" at the school with her firmly established identity. The hiring of a new teacher raised the issue of change. Everyone concerned knew that things would be different, but views varied on what changes should occur. Before the school year started, Anne worried "that the community will expect me to be Nellie."

In a larger sense, the change of teachers merely reflected movement occurring in the community as a whole, as Lodi struggled to preserve the past while adjusting to modern innovations. Anne felt the pressure of the transition, saying, "I [had] a lot of anxiety about the first week of school, just feeling out that balance [between change and tradition]." After teaching half the year, she remarked, "It's hard to talk to parents about changes and growth. People expect school to be as [it was] when they were in school. That's unrealistic, especially as the world is changing."

When the school year started, new white and rose paint, sanded wood floors, and different furniture arrangements and room decorations met the children. Anne discussed the fact that she and the first-graders felt like "newcomers" or "outsiders" since the older children "knew the ropes." Most community members recognized the difficulty of Anne's position. One older native commented, "We should give her a chance. She can't come into the school, knowing it all. She needs to prove

herself, but she shouldn't be judged until the end of the year." According to School Supervisor Hugh Thompson, Anne is under pressure. "She must be careful not to jump on bandwagons. Anne needs to develop a program which is best for her and her kids. That's her responsibility." Hugh noted:

Anne is really like a first-year teacher, feeling her oats. Nellie went through the same thing. It's like apples and oranges. There are real differences here. There will be bad times and good times. I think Anne should be given a chance to establish herself.

### A YEAR OF INNOVATION

It cannot be assumed that Nellie represents tradition and Anne change in Lodi School. Both teachers value the rural heritage of family, community, hard work, and schooling. They both believe in commitment and excellence, which require the teacher to be knowledgeable about new materials and teaching techniques. But the two teachers also represent significant differences, many of which could be predicted, knowing their ages, backgrounds, and personalities. These differences show up in three specific areas: educational philosophy, curriculum, and teaching materials.

#### EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The following excerpt is from Nellie Rempis's written philosophy:

Education is the preparation for the tomorrows . . . academically, socially, and spiritually. . . . Elementary education should consist of a thorough basic knowledge of reading, arithmetic, and writing. . . . No other field can be explored by a student until he can be independent by possessing a set of tools he himself can manipulate. This cannot be obtained until a child realizes that very little in life can be achieved without work. A child is not fooled when a school tries by some means of subterfuge to have present "playthings" to entertain on the pretext that he is learning to his potential.

A child will always be a member of society, so a school should be geared to teach incidentally the rules he is expected to follow for life. He should not be placed in

a cubicle that only has his age level, as this is not realistic. With a wide span of age and learning levels, he can be shown that learning takes place by listening for review of things he has attained, challenged by listening to things he hopes to attain. He can learn the older must have concern for the younger, the younger must have respect for the older, and that there are naturally leaders and followers. He can learn he must share time and respect others' rights, while at the same time be independent and responsible. This all is life.

This passage reflects Nellie's emphasis on academics, especially the "basics," which are to be mastered through "hard work." As a specialist said, "Nellie ran a tight ship. Habits and schemes were adhered to." Nellie's school day was carefully structured. Everything was presented at a certain, set time. If one child misbehaved, "all privileges in the whole classroom were lost." Evelyn commented, "She believed in the system that she taught. Her standards were incredibly high, and the children did succeed." Yet some parents viewed her strictness as excessive. One said, "She had done things a certain way for years. She wasn't about to make changes or allowances."

The second focus evident in Nellie's philosophy is her emphasis on children's socialization, with special value given to their concern for each other, respect, independence, and responsibility. Visitors to Nellie's classroom were impressed when a child would arrange chairs for them and offer them cups of coffee. Phone callers were greeted with a child answering, "Hello, Lodi School. This is Debby speaking. May I help you?" At lunch time, children took turns serving all adults first. Then students took their lunches to placemat-covered desks and carefully placed folded napkins in their laps. All of these social skills have been continued by Anne this year.

The difference in philosophy between the two teachers is evident in how they choose to be addressed by the children. Nellie is called "Mrs. Rempis" or "Mrs. R." Anne Martin is called "Anne." A few parents were bothered with Anne's decision

to be called by her first name. Others like it. A native parent said, "I'm big on respect for elders. That's the way I was brought up. This year is more relaxed, but less respectful. The kids wouldn't have walked up and said, "Hey, Nellie." Anne feels how she was to be addressed was "a big decision":

In the past I had been called "Anne," but I thought coming into Lodi, I probably should be called "Mrs. Martin." I expressed that to the school board and some parents and [the school board chairman] said, "That's not a problem at all. Parents won't have a problem with it either. Do whatever you're comfortable with."

Nellie's husband describes their differences by labeling Nellie as "conservative" and Anne as a "freer spirit." A looser classroom structure reflects Anne's approach to instruction. Desks are placed in a U-shape, clusters, or other configurations as the situation dictates. The schedule is more flexible, allowing children to move around and to make choices for independent projects. "Fun" and opportunities for students to express themselves are priorities. Anne says, "For me the most important thing is a pupil's self-image. I want the children to want to come to school."

Nellie imposed control through her classroom structure and demanded that children obey rules. Anne seeks to make children responsible by developing the pupils' inner controls. She admits, "I'm sure it's not the same. It's not dead quiet in here. But they [parents] like the children learning to express themselves." Evelyn feels a primary difference is that Anne focuses more on getting children motivated, on getting them to want to learn. Anne considers the children's personal problems to be an important part of her job. She expressed her philosophy this way:

Learning goes beyond the three "R's." Social aspects and the ability to communicate are as important as learning to read. Sometimes people get a real tunnel vision as to what education is. They can only look at how much a child can produce, rather than the possibilities of what he could be.



Anne replaced prayer at the beginning of each day with physical exercises, but practices such as brushing teeth after lunch, manners, the flag salute, and the celebration of holidays continue.

#### THE CURRICULUM

Nellie was proud of the fact that

I never changed from the phonics, and I never would as long as I taught. . . . You change. You try to keep up with the times, [yet] there's something that you refuse to do. I always refused to do the whole language books, because I do not believe in it. But you teach by computer or TV. But I believe in the basics. You have to have the tools first.

Nellie's school day was spent with children independently pursuing individualized lessons with the exception of social studies classes.

In contrast, Anne schedules most of the day with group lessons or class instruction. She feels, "Basics of education are most important--skills like reading, writing, and arithmetic. With those skills, you can acquire any information you want." Reading is taught with the 1980 Economy basal reading series. Whole-language experiences are used with the younger children and any older children with reading problems. The 1981 Mathematics for Mastery series is coupled with Math Their Way, a "hands-on" approach to teaching math. Anne has expanded science lessons and presents them to all the children, not just the older ones. She places less emphasis on penmanship. Nellie viewed handwriting as an important end, for "penmanship says something about yourself, comparable to running around in rags." Anne views it as a means for expression.

At the end of the school year, Anne expressed relief at having "taken care of the foundation part" of adjusting to a one-room school curriculum, having it "set for next year, so I can develop curriculum more creatively."



## TEACHING RESOURCES

When she retired from Lodi School, Nellie left an accumulation of over forty years' worth of personal teaching resources, plus what Evelyn and Anne described as "every textbook that was published from the 1920s on." They spent three mornings a week during the summer of 1987, sorting through the accumulation and identifying needs. There weren't funds for new textbooks. Evelyn said:

There are a lot of things that we need that we've done without, because Nellie didn't see a need for them. . . . But you know, it's going to cost money. Anne's going to have to deal with that at some point. She's facing a battle, because it's again a change, since they've never had to deal with anybody wanting more. In the past the teacher was very, very budget-oriented. She never asked for anything more than the minimum.

According to Nellie's husband, his wife had set a precedent of being quite sparing with school supplies. He commented:

She wouldn't ask for anything unless she needed it. She was all for the child, but always conscious of the cost to the community. Nellie would do by herself whenever possible. Anne is more likely to ask, and want, help. For example, in Woodsville [where they live], the school wanted acoustical tile. When it was discussed, Nellie said, "Why don't you cut your noise down?" But there's no more committed person than Nellie to schools.

Part of Nellie's frugality resulted from her concern over the school's existence. She told Anne, "You want to keep this school going, keep the budget down." Anne commented, "It's amazing. Even the Chapter 2 money—she had over a thousand dollars accumulating, but she wasn't spending it. Those are funds that don't come out of the town's pocket."

Anne is adept at locating and obtaining materials and volunteer help for the classroom. Because she taught in other area schools, she knows what resources are available and is not hesitant about borrowing what she can. Aware that the school has limited resources, she encourages children to use things carefully. One day she exclaimed in frustration:

Why do kids break pencils? There's no need for that. And Dan chews up all his pencils. It wasn't a problem last year, because the kids only got one pencil each morning and had to hand it in at the end of the day. I want kids to be responsible, but they also have to have freedom to use those responsibilities.

#### STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

Some of the differences between Nellie and Anne are reflected in comments made by the students. About Anne they said:

"She helps us."

"She goes out and plays with us."

"She brings lots to school for us."

"We do projects and stuff. Last year, we never got to do science projects and stuff. It was always work, work, work, and reading."

"She is pretty. I like her—I love her. That's it."

"She listens when you have problems."

About Nellie, the students said:

"She's nice. She cared about us."

"Mrs. R.'s voice made it sound like she was yelling, but she really wasn't."

"We had our desks in rows last year."

"She was old-fashioned. She'd say, 'Napkins on your lap, girls first, raise your hand, don't complain, use your spoon the right way—not like a shovel.'"

"You learned from Mrs. R."

"My [older] brother says he misses Mrs. R., because he still gets in trouble, and Mrs. R. helped him not get in trouble."

#### BALANCING TRADITION AND CHANGE

The teacher's role in Lodi is to provide stability in the community by perpetuating its traditional values. Historically, small, rural communities in Vermont have sought "cultural

reproduction" as a means of survival. But today, small communities must change to meet contemporary needs. Therefore, the teacher must play a balancing role between educational tradition and change by anticipating problems, controlling events, providing guidelines, and involving others in the process.

If the teacher is able to play this balancing role, that teacher first must thoroughly understand tradition. Nellie commented, "We need a viable society, one which gives a hold on the past. Some traditions should change, but we need to care about what we hang onto. We don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water." Nellie's favorite expression, "The more things change, the more they remain the same," reflects the fact that rural school traditions such as multiage grouping of students, individualized instruction, and mastery learning have been introduced at many urban and suburban schools as contemporary innovations.

Besides valuing existing tradition, teachers also must value the possibility of innovation, since "change is inescapable in education today" (Lortie, p. 214). Griffin (1984) feels the times call for movement to "involve instead of isolate, to promote risk taking instead of preservation of the status quo, to celebrate change instead of fearing it, to concentrate on growth rather than on remaining static" (p. 17). Hugh Thompson echoes this view when stating his own view of the process of change in small communities:

If a teacher dreads a situation, then it will be draining. But if we approach each situation positively and say, "This is going to be exciting. I'm ready for this. I wonder what challenge I'm going to meet now. What can I learn from this?"—instead of putting up a defensive wall or trying to avoid it—then every time I interact, I'll grow from it and the program will grow from it.

The future success of schools in all settings depends on educators' ability to balance educational tradition with desirable changes.



## V.

### WHAT CAN BE LEARNED?

*A teacher should reflect a community's values. My purpose is to be of service to this town. If I'm not serving Lodi, then I'm not fulfilling my obligations. But I feel it's also important for me to be a leader, because they're looking for me to be a leader too.*

-Anne Martin, Lodi Teacher

Anne finds that the factors that provide her greatest satisfaction also prove to be her greatest areas of concern as she carries out her role as the Lodi schoolmarm. The small scale of Lodi School proves to be both the primary advantage and greatest disadvantage of teaching in that setting, just as isolation fosters independence, and tradition provides a perspective which affects change. Furthermore, each of the issues which affect Anne is complex. Each frequently is connected to one or more of the other issues. For instance, because Lodi School is in an isolated area, enrollment is limited and desired changes occur quickly and easily. Recognizing the complexity of the issues, what can one learn from a contemporary schoolmarm as personified by Anne Martin?

### DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LODI SCHOOLMARM

#### TEACHING STANDARDS

Anne exceeds Vermont teaching standards. She is well qualified as evidenced by her college training, certification credentials, and observable skills. She is typical of most contemporary, rural schoolteachers who no longer are untrained and incompetent. Muse, Smith, and Barker conclude that present-day one-room schools and teachers contrast significantly from the situation of a quarter of a century ago:

Today's one-teacher schools . . . are better equipped, have better facilities, and use updated instructional



materials. Further, teachers are as professionally prepared and educated as are their urban counterparts. Ultimately, evidence indicates that students from one-teacher schools perform academically and are as successful in high school and college. (1987, p. 5)

At Lodi, children progress well. Residents report the achievement levels of Lodi students who arrive at Glencliff High School average two months ahead of those of other students. Since there is no indication that Lodi pupils are inherently superior to the children in neighboring towns, it appears that they are receiving effective instruction.

More stringent standards have contributed to improvements in rural schools in recent years; however, excellence occurs when teachers view guidelines as minimums, not as ultimate goals. Anne excels not because she meets minimum standards set by regulating bodies, but because she possesses strong personal characteristics, such as caring, energy, and creativity. These qualities and skills, such as her ability to organize, implement, and evaluate a wide variety of multigrade-level programs, are not recognized by traditional evaluation measures.

Governing bodies must set flexible standards which ensure excellence while respecting unique attributes of individual schools. Certification regulations should acknowledge that prerequisite skills may differ in rural settings. Small-school teachers need to excel as generalists, not specialists. A current proposal being studied by the State Department of Education to separate certification for primary- and middle-grade teachers is not desirable from a small-school perspective.

Other initiatives may contribute towards increasing the effectiveness of rural professionals. First, the removal of responsibility for nonteaching tasks would free teachers' energies. Computers and telecommunications may allow secretarial tasks such as attendance and ordering of supplies to be transferred to a school district office. Second, colleges and

universities should reassess their urban model of teacher training. Current experiential and psychological preparation for rural schools is inadequate (Carlson and Matthes, 1985). Although Anne's general teacher-training program was good, her first year at Lodi would have been much more difficult for her if she had not been familiar with the school and the community before she started. Few higher education institutions address specific small-school needs such as the ability to work with multiage groupings and rural sociology. Third, in-service training and professional growth options should be more accessible.

#### INVOLVEMENT WITH PUPILS

Anne is intimately involved with her pupils, their parents, and the community through sustained relationships both within and outside school. Because she is engaged with others from the school setting over extended periods of time, Anne cares more deeply about them, and in turn they value and respect her to a greater degree. This gives her power, a sense of purpose, and additional job satisfaction.

Because of her involvement, Anne has an identity which integrates her role as a teacher with her sense of self as an individual. Anne does not compartmentalize her life as teachers in other contemporary school settings tend to do, because she interacts with the same people within and outside the school setting. Likewise, others consider Anne to be "the schoolmarm," even when she is encountered in different contexts.

The importance of the close relationships which Anne develops and sustains should not be underestimated, and the one-room school model may have special significance in schools which suffer from community indifference, teacher alienation, and instability of students' personal lives. Possibilities include increasing parental and community involvement, the

placement of children over longer time periods with the same teacher, and multiage groupings which emphasize cooperation.

### INDEPENDENCE

Anne is a unique, autonomous being. She uses her skills to perform independently instead of being bound by set regulations and practices determined by others. She not only implements policy, she helps to set it. Anne has complete authority to do as she feels best within the confines set by law, tradition, and community expectations. The opportunity to make choices gives her a special commitment and sense of ownership in Lodi. It also requires her to be self-sufficient.

Autonomy is related to the ability to transcend minimum teaching standards. Anne must envision and implement goals beyond guidelines set by state regulating bodies or her school district. As schools become larger and more bureaucratic, contemporary teachers lose the perception that they can have an impact on the system, and this perception negatively affects their actual ability to do so. As a result, some educators fear that teachers have become technicians instead of developing as professionals. To counteract this, teachers in all settings should be respected as autonomous individuals who negotiate unique identities. Whereas a strong persona is a necessity in a one-room setting, it is desirable in other contexts as well.

### COMMITMENT TO VALUES

Anne is committed to traditional values while welcoming and creating change. She balances her personal freedom with a commitment to values, traditions, and her community. Most teachers care about children, or they would not have chosen teaching as a profession, but the one-room schoolteacher also feels a broader commitment to her community. Her ties to the setting and to the school's history give a sense of stability

and continuity. A specific sense of tradition, such as that existing in a one-room school, may not be possible in a new school setting. However, teachers may benefit from exploring their teaching heritage. This broader perspective would provide a valuable framework as teachers examine their own particular teaching philosophies and commitments.

Advantages of teaching in a one-room school were summarized by Sale:

It does seem rather interesting that the big schools nowadays are all working rapidly, at great expense and with much hoopla, to implement such innovations as open classrooms, peer-tutoring, multi-grade classes, individualized instruction, and community participation—the very things that existed inherently in the small school in the small community, particularly the one-room schoolhouse, and that were so often lost in the pell-mell rush to Conant-sized institutions. (1982, p. 282)

### NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF TEACHING

#### IN A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL

What attributes of a one-room school should be minimized or eliminated? A number of negative aspects should be addressed not only in small-school settings but also in any other school contexts in which they might occur.

#### ISOLATION

Anne Martin suffers from isolation. Small-school teachers often "burn out" from heavy responsibilities, a lack of interaction with other educational professionals, and difficulties in the areas of communication, transportation, and available resources. Anne has no buffers in her interactions. Community involvement in its extreme becomes community meddling. Anne has little privacy, and her personal cultural and social life is limited.

In their efforts to become less isolated, it appears that rural teachers are becoming increasingly dependent on structured amenities that teachers generally rely on, such as



supervisors, school specialists, and new teaching materials. An understanding of the "outside world" is as important to the contemporary teacher as knowledge about her rural community. Teachers in small settings must learn from the strengths of larger schools, just as large schools must examine what is of value in their smaller counterparts.

#### URBAN BIAS

Anne is affected negatively by an urban bias. Rural teachers find an urban influence permeates many mandated requirements including the Vermont Public School Approval process, certification regulations, and building standards. Most school reform during the last century was based on urban models as a result of the commonly held notion that rural implies inferior and old-fashioned (Tyack, 1974; DeYoung, 1987). This bias has continued in the policies and practices of contemporary schooling (Sher, 1977; Nachtigal, 1982).

Public perceptions reflect an urban bias. Outsiders often view the rural teacher as an oddity or as a country bumpkin. One Vermont college wouldn't let one of their students student-teach in Lodi, because they felt she would not get a good experience and subsequently would not be able to get a job in another setting. Mr. R. expressed his feelings concerning this prejudice: "There was a lady last year who visited our school and asked, 'Do you have indoor plumbing?' I resented that."

A new perspective on rural schooling is needed which eliminates this bias and recognizes strengths in small schools. Most rural schools are neither like "Little House on the Prairie" nor are they outdated, inferior structures which house backwards children and incompetent teachers. Policymakers and researchers should value what these schools can provide, rather than impose restrictions and regulations which are not relevant and which are impossible to implement.



## LIMITED OPTIONS

Anne's setting offers limited choices and resources. Few options exist for peer groupings, physical building space, alternative staffings, curriculum, and resources. Anne is able to compensate for most of these deficiencies; however, teachers in other one-room schools may not. There is a danger that the teacher may affect pupils in negative ways. Much of the success or failure of the school depends on the teacher.

Size limitations make the school inefficient, and most small schools suffer from being located in poor, rural communities. State of Vermont Education Department statistics show that in 1982, Lodi spent \$1,513 per pupil compared with a state average of \$1,999, and a national average of \$2,700. By the 1986-87 school year, these figures had increased to \$2,446 for Lodi and \$3,283 for the state. Anne must use supplies carefully and is more poorly paid than if she taught in another school.

Innovative support is necessary if small, rural schools are to survive. These schools need resources that they currently may not be able to provide, such as technological advances, better pre-service and in-service training, collegial models of supervision, orientation of new teachers into community life, and improved delivery systems for special-needs children. Specifically, support is needed in several areas:

1. New funding systems for technology, supplies, and teachers' salaries are essential.
2. State education departments must serve as advocates and support systems by providing expertise, dispensing information, and initiating resources such as the newly formed teaching principals' group. The state should simplify, not complicate a teacher's existence. As Anne said, "Is it possible to have an easy checklist for small schools without the teacher having to be a lawyer to read the regulations?"
3. Trained substitute teachers and specialists are needed.

DeYoung (1987, p. 123) noted the dominance of research in urban educational settings over the past century. Although rural issues are emerging in recent studies, the following areas need more examination: the effect of the rural turnaround on small schools, the effect of local versus district school boards, funding issues, possibilities in new technology, and the role of administrators in small schools. New models are needed which provide solutions, not just identify deficiencies.

### EXPECTATIONS

Anne faces unattainable expectations. It is unrealistic to expect one individual to have the expertise and energy to do everything demanded of teachers in our contemporary, complex society. The children of every community have a variety of needs which are almost impossible for one individual to meet. In a one-room school this difficulty is intensified because of the spread in instructional levels. In addition, increased state regulations result in hours of paperwork, and changing community expectations compound the complexity of a one-room schoolteacher's role. The rural turnaround causes further stress as newcomers move into small communities with different ideas about what schooling they want for their children. Small schools need clear priorities to guide choices, the elimination of unnecessary tasks which divert energy, and new ways to unify community demands.

Many of the above disadvantages to teaching in contemporary small schools reflect the same comments recorded by Mason Stone in the 1898 Vermont School Reports:

The graded school teacher has less responsibility, less number of classes, less daily preparation, less range of subjects, less difference in age and attainment of pupils; more privileges, more adequate supplies, more time for recitations, more weeks per year, better surroundings, greater compensation, and usually better training than the ungraded teacher. (Vermont, State Superintendent of Education, p. 28)

There are some features of teaching in a one-room school which should pass with time, yet one-room schools provide an important legacy which not only has implications for contemporary small schools but also for educational policies and practices in other educational contexts as well. In some settings a one-room school still may be the community's best option for quality schooling, while in other settings it may be desirable to consolidate existing schools. There is no one "best system" model (Tyack, 1974, p. 14) that should be adopted universally. Educational settings should reflect the diversity of school communities which exist in our country.

Retaining uniqueness does not mean that small schools should remain unchanged, but rather that differences must be recognized as new models emerge which incorporate the strengths of teaching in a small-scale setting while minimizing the disadvantages. In this manner the legacy of Anne Martin and other one-room schoolmarms may continue.





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## APPENDIX

### Significant Educational Events in Vermont<sup>1</sup>

- 1777 The Vermont Constitution, ratified by the legislature in 1779, provides for the establishment and support of schools in each town.
- 1780 The first secondary school is chartered in Bennington.
- 1781 The legislature passes an act empowering towns to levy taxes for the building of schoolhouses.
- 1782 An act creates school districts to be governed by trustees or selectmen.
- 1785 The first county grammar school is established at Norwich.
- 1785 Jacob Eddy of Danby, Vermont, starts the first recorded class for those who want to teach in the state.
- 1787 Town trustees are given the authority to "appoint and remove school masters."
- 1795 The power to appoint and release teachers is transferred from towns to school districts.
- 1797 English reading, writing, and arithmetic are specified as required subjects for instruction. Towns are now required to provide schools.
- 1801 First reference in [Lodi] town records to a school.
- 1814-15 Emma Hart Willard conducts the first classes for women teachers in Middlebury.
- 1823 Rev. Samuel Reed Hall forms the first teacher training institution in the United States at Concord Corner, March 11, 1823, with ten men and eleven women students.
- 1826 The first State Board of Education is formed and subsequently abolished in 1833. The board is revived and disbanded several times during the next century.

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<sup>1</sup> Primary sources include the following: Bailey, 1939; Bush, 1900; Elsbree, 1939; Finkelstein, 1970; Huden, 1943; Stone, c.1927; State Superintendent of Common Schools reports; and Vermont School Reports. Whenever possible, dates were cross-checked.

- 1827 Vermont passes a law for the examination of teachers, which addresses moral character, literary qualification, and ability to govern a school. The law is repealed in 1833.
- 1829 Reverend Hall publishes the first printed book in the United States on instruction entitled Lectures on School Keeping.
- 1836 The first teachers' convention is held in Montpelier (Stone c. 1927), although Bush (1900) records possible conventions in 1830-31, held in conjunction with local lyceums.
- 1845 Power for certification examinations is given to town and district superintendents.
- 1845 Gov. Horace Eaton appoints himself the first state superintendent of education and gives his first report to the legislature the following year.
- 1846 The first state Teachers' Institute is held in Essex.
- 1847 In May the first school periodical in Vermont is published and named the School Journal and Vermont Agriculturalist.
- 1850 The Vermont State Teachers' Association is formed.
- 1856 A law provides that one Teachers' Institute will be held in each county annually.
- 1857 The current Lodi schoolhouse is constructed.
- 1858 School registers are devised by the state superintendent. Power of removal of incompetent teachers is given to town superintendents.
- 1859 The Vermont Teachers' Association starts the Vermont School Journal and Family Visitor.
- 1864 Schools become totally free; no taxes can be laid upon pupils.
- 1866 The Vermont General Assembly funds the first state normal school at Randolph Center. Johnson and Castleton also become state normal schools.
- 1866 The Legislature provides for examinations for state certificates to be given to prospective teachers at each teachers' institute.

- 1867 Vermont becomes the second state in the United States to establish a compulsory attendance law requiring children between eight and fourteen years of age to attend school for a minimum of three months annually.
- 1882 Certificates to teach continue to be issued to those as young as thirteen years of age.
- 1890 The minimum age for certification is set at seventeen years of age.
- The first state school tax law is enacted.
- 1890 The prescribed course of study at Randolph Normal School for the first term of two years included:
- D Term: Geometry, School Discipline, English, Botany, Physiology  
 C Term: Algebra, Drawing, English, Education  
 B Term: Arithmetic, Psychology, English, Geography  
 A Term: Arithmetic, Pedagogics, History of the U.S. and Civics, English
- Mental Arithmetic twice a week through the first year. Penmanship for the "D" and Physics for the "C" class, each, once a week. Gymnastics for all; vocal music without extra charge.
- 1895 A state reading circle is formed in which four hundred teachers read three books, Painter's History of Education, Baldwin's Elements of Psychology, and Howland's Practical Hints on Teaching.
- 1897-88 Females in Vermont earn \$2-\$3 a week as a seamstress, \$1.25-\$1.75 as a domestic, and \$1.00-\$1.50 plus board as a teacher.
- 1904 Vermont State Board of Health begins to pass on the lighting and sanitation of schools.
- 1910 Union superintendents are authorized to advise school boards concerning employment of teachers.
- 1910 Vermont School Reports note that fewer than 16% of rural teachers are trained. One-year programs are devised to fill the large number of vacancies in the state.
- 1911 The first teachers' pension law is enacted for teachers who have taught in Vermont for thirty years or more.

- 1912 The State Teachers' Retirement Fund Board is created. The Carnegie Commission conducts a detailed study of Vermont schools.
- 1916 Instructors in teacher training courses, normal schools, and colleges are given power to conduct examinations for certification.
- 1917 Law prohibits school boards from employing teachers without the district superintendent's approval.
- 1919 State refuses to renew the charters of Castleton and Johnson as normal schools although both continue with limited assistance from the state. (Randolph became a state agricultural school in 1911.)
- 1921 The standardization-of-schools movement requires a school teacher to have twenty-four weeks of prior teaching experience before her school can be rated as "superior."
- 1924 Local school directors are allowed to hire "permit teachers" who can be any high school graduate who passes an examination designed by the local directors. This practice is abused by many.
- 1931-32 Teacher preparation standards are raised significantly. A substantial teacher shortage results.
- 1932-33 Regulations increase the length of the school year for elementary students to thirty-six weeks annually. During this school year, 993 of 1,391 schools in the state are one-room; 146, two-room; 160, graded; and 92, high school.
- 1933 One-year training programs run by the state are abandoned.
- 1934 Life certificates for teachers are abolished.
- 1935 Lula Davisson is hired to teach in Lodi for one year.
- 1937-38 46.5% of Vermont teachers have had two years training, 11% have bachelor's degrees with a median of 6.6 years of experience.
- 1946 A quarter of Vermont schools are without regularly certified teachers. This low number of certified teachers is not due solely to World War II. Figures for 1947-48 show two and a half times the number of teachers working under emergency certification than for the 1942-43 school year.

- 1947-49 Lula Davisson is hired again to teach in Lodi.
- 1949-50 Figures show 43.6% of rural teacher positions are filled by teachers not meeting standard professional certification standards.
- 1956 This is the first year that there are more elementary teachers with four-year degrees in the state than those with two-three years of training.
- 1963-87 Nellie Rempis is hired to teach at Lodi School.
- 1987 Anne Martin is hired to teach at Lodi School.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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This drawing of the Lodi School is one of a collection presented to researcher Kenny by the children of Lodi.